



SHREWSBURY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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April 29, 2020

To: School Committee

From: Joe Sawyer

Re: Pay continuity for staff during the COVID-19 pandemic school closure

Dear School Committee:

At your meetings on March 18, 2020, you voted to authorize that hourly-paid and salaried employees receive their typical pay for mandated closure days through April 6, the original length of Gov. Baker's order to close schools. Subsequent to that, the Governor extended the school closure through May 1. At your April 1, 2020 meeting, you voted to extend pay for all employees through April 17, which represented one additional payroll period, per my recommendation. At your April 15, 2020 meeting, you extended pay for all employees again, through Friday, May 1, again per my recommendation.

As you know, last week Gov. Baker extended the school closure period through the end of the current school year. Based on this, I am asking the School Committee to take action at your meeting this evening regarding pay continuation, as described below.

Mr. Collins has continued to analyze the district's financial resources, as noted in the slide presentation for tonight's meeting. Mr. Collins's report also created a framework that illustrates the multiple dimensions that must be considered regarding the decision to continue employees' pay during the school closure. These include:

- Fiscal impact of continued pay
- Availability of funds for continued pay
- Cost implications of furloughs or layoffs (local cost of unemployment system)
- Administrative burden (communication & processing re: unemployment system)
- Impact on the School Department's budget (current year and next year)
- State and federal guidance and eligibility for potential funding tied to maintaining jobs
- Continuity of services during the closure and upon reopening
- Disruption to employees
- Morale and loyalty of employees
- Taxpayer sentiment

These dimensions must be considered in light of the options relative to continued pay, furloughing some number of employees, and/or laying off some number of employees.

My recommendations are as follows:

- 1) Given that professional educators (teachers, counselors, psychologists, school nurses, etc.); paraprofessionals; secretaries, clerical, and information technology support staff; and administrators are all working remotely, it is necessary and appropriate to continue their normal pay for the remainder of the school year, which is now scheduled to end on Tuesday, June 16 (note: some of these positions work contracts beyond the end of the school year).
- 2) Rotating teams of food services workers (i.e., cafeteria staff) have been working to provide meals for both pick up and delivery for students whose circumstances require this. Additionally, all cafeteria staff are scheduled to perform work in the near future to clean kitchen spaces (using appropriate precautions), now that the state has lifted restrictions on performing cleaning and maintenance of school buildings. It is my recommendation to take another incremental step with regard to this group of employees by voting to continue the food service workers' pay for the next pay period, which encompasses May 4 - May 15. This will cost approximately \$34,000, which is available in the revolving fund for Food Services. I will bring an updated recommendation to you regarding this employee group at your May 13 meeting.

- 3) Our 16 employees who are working part-time roles as crossing guards and door monitor positions (nine of whom work in another capacity for the district) are not able to work remotely in these roles, and it is my recommendation that these employees be furloughed from these roles effective the close of business on May 1, 2020 until the start of business on the morning of Monday, June 15, 2020.
- 4) We have 90 employees working in our Extended School Care program, 34 of whom work for the district only in that program (five who work 35 hours/week or more, 12 who work between 20 and 34 hours/week, and 17 who work fewer than 20 hours) and 56 of whom also work as paraprofessionals for SPS (with a typical schedule of six hours/week in Extended School Care beyond their paraprofessional job). As you know, the district has exhausted the revolving account for Extended School Care due to the stoppage of tuition payments and the continued pay of the employees since the school closure, so that approximately \$110,000 is already needed to be transferred from the appropriated budget to cover their pay through May 1. Given the financial implications, it is my recommendation that these employees be furloughed from these roles effective the close of business on May 1, 2020 until the start of business on the morning of Monday, June 15, 2020. The Director of Extended Learning and the Assistant to the Director of Extended Learning would not be furloughed, as they will be needed to assist furloughed ESC staff with unemployment claim paperwork, which will be substantial.

The impact of these recommended furloughs on the School Department payroll will be avoiding the expenditures of approximately \$192,000, while the cost of unemployment is estimated at approximately \$48,000, as under updated federal law the town will be responsible for 25% of the cost.

Please note that all employees who are filling positions that are furloughed will be eligible to file for unemployment claims for lost pay, and that for those who are eligible for benefits, the Town's portion of payment for health insurance premiums remains in force (the employee is required to pay the employee's share "over the counter," but is not required to use the COBRA process).

It is with reluctance that I make these recommendations for furloughs, and I want to make clear that we value these roles highly and we will support these individuals in filing for unemployment benefits. The purpose of the furlough is to keep their jobs intact with the intent of having them resume to do some training and preparation work at the end of June to be ready for the start of school in the fall when students are able to return in some fashion.

I recommend that the School Committee vote to approve the following suggested motions:

That the Committee vote to approve the continued compensation of the following salaried and hourly employees during the school closure period, at their contractual rates of pay based on their typical time worked per pay period, for the remainder of their contractual work year during Fiscal Year 2020, which ends June 30, 2020: professional educators in the Shrewsbury Education Association Unit A; paraprofessionals in the Shrewsbury Paraprofessional Association; unclassified staff including secretaries, clerical support staff, and information technology staff; administrators in the Shrewsbury Education Association Unit B; and all non-represented school administrators.

That the Committee vote to approve the continued compensation of all Food Services Department employees for at least the dates of May 5 through May 15 of the mandated school closure for the COVID-19 pandemic, at their contractual rates of pay based on their typical time worked per pay period.

That the Committee vote to place the following positions on furlough effective with the end of business on Friday, May 1 through the start of business on the morning of Monday, June 15: all crossing guards, all door monitors, and all Extended School Day positions, with the exception of the Director of Extended Learning and the Assistant to the Director of Extended Learning.

I look forward to answering any questions you have regarding this recommendation at our meeting this evening.