



Shrewsbury Public Schools

Joseph M. Sawyer, Ed.D.
Superintendent

March 18, 2020

To: School Committee
From: Joe Sawyer
Re: Continuity of pay for Shrewsbury Public Schools staff

The COVID-19 pandemic crisis has placed our school district in an unprecedented position given the mandated school closure of three weeks as part of the state government's efforts to slow the spread of the virus.

In response to this reality, the district has shifted to a work-from-home model in order to maintain operations and to provide remote learning for students as well as support for them and their families.

The initial two days of closures simply shifted what would have been school days to the end of the school year calendar in June, so our school-based hourly employees were not paid for those days. As one can imagine, our school-based hourly employees are extremely concerned about further loss of pay, and the potential subsequent unaffordability of health benefits that could result. One of the most important commitments an employer has is to the well-being of its employees, and it is my strong recommendation that the School Committee authorize that hourly-paid employees receive their typical pay for the subsequent mandated closure days through April 6, in addition to salaried employees receiving their continued compensation as well. In all cases, we have evolving plans in place to have all staff perform various duties remotely when working from home, whether contributing to operations (including continued provision of meals for students who need them), supporting student learning, or participating in training or professional development.

I am making this recommendation because it is the right thing to do to support the well-being of our hard-working, dedicated staff during a time of crisis. It is also the pragmatic thing to do, as it will not serve our school district well if we have hourly staff who experience financial or health insurance crises that will make it difficult for them to return to work quickly when the closure is lifted. Additionally, since we are a self-insured town government relative to unemployment insurance, not providing compensation for an extended period of time would still put financial pressure on the town's overall financial resources, not to mention placing a significant administrative processing burden during a crisis upon multiple town departments (including ours). Also of note, I am not aware of

any Massachusetts school district that is not paying all of its employees during this school closure period.

Our current budget status shows that the funds for paying all of our employees through April 6 are available. As most employees' pay comes from the appropriated budget, the vast majority of compensation funding will continue to be available beyond this date, should the closure last longer. Mr. Collins and his team are working diligently to assess the many and varied impacts that the pandemic may have on our school district's finances overall, so that we can plan how we might address a longer-term closure beyond April 6. For example, if school closures are extended, we know that we will experience additional revenue loss for some tuition-supported programs such as full-day kindergarten, preschool, and extended school care; at the same time, we will not be paying certain expenses, such as daily substitute teachers. Because of the high level of uncertainty at this time, I believe it is prudent to focus on the length of closure that has been officially established and for the School Committee to authorize payment to all employees for remote work during the closure that has been implemented through April 6. This is with the caveat that, for the reasons articulated above, my strong recommendation is to find ways to continue to pay all employees, both salaried and hourly, to work remotely even if a longer closure is mandated or necessary.

I recommend that you vote to approve the following motion:

That the School Committee approve the continued compensation of all Shrewsbury Public Schools employees during the mandated school closure through April 6 for the COVID-19 pandemic, including both salaried and hourly employees, at their contractual rates of pay based on their typical time worked per pay period.