

To the Braintree School Committee,

The members of the Braintree Educators Association (BEA) have voted no confidence in the School Committee.

While it is disappointing that the BEA has lost confidence in the Mayor and the School Committee, it should come as no surprise. Over the past year, the School Committee has ignored the opinions, concerns, and recommendations of the educators and administrators who have dedicated their careers to the children and families of this district.

The lack of respect from the Mayor and School Committee started prior to the beginning of the academic year when the plans that had been worked out between Central Administration, parents, and the BEA were scuttled without discussion by members of the School Committee. This left educators scrambling to make sense of a directive that gave no time for appropriate planning. Poor decisions were made for the sake of expediency. These poor decisions have continued to impede educational planning all year. It has caused unneeded chaos for students and families with constantly changing schedules. The Mayor and School Committee's inability to collaborate with Central Office and the BEA to come up with one cohesive plan for the school year has created numerous unnecessary difficulties for our community.

We find ourselves at a point again where the School Committee is ignoring the professional recommendations of the administration and staff. Central Office and the BEA agreed to and implemented a plan on February 1 that brought stability to the schedules and increased synchronous learning time for ALL students for the foreseeable future. The School Committee, though, unexpectedly announced on Feb. 22 its intention to begin bargaining with the BEA for a full, in-person return at the High School on March 15 and at the Middle Schools and Elementary Schools on April 1. Making such an announcement a mere three weeks before such plans are to be implemented displays the School Committee's total disregard for the ongoing collaboration and the professional expertise of the Central Office and the BEA.

The School Committee dates have created yet another crisis for the community. Other than being politically expedient, these dates are arbitrary at best. The reality is that there is no plan to safely return students to full in-person learning by those dates and ensure that academic, health and safety needs can all be met.

The School Committee knows, or should know, that Commissioner Riley recommends a phased-in approach to a full, in-person return to school beginning with elementary school students and then older grades. The School Committee is proposing the opposite. The thoughtless nature of the School Committee's proposal is highlighted by the initial return date for elementary and middle school students on April 1, which is the day before a long weekend.

The standard response to any questions about how schools will quickly transition to full in-person learning has been, "We're working on a plan for that." The School Committee must be honest with the students, families and educators about the lack of preparedness. Anything less than transparency under these circumstances is irresponsible and prevents the community members from making informed decisions.

There has been no public statement from the BEA because we hoped that through bargaining our concerns and thoughts would be heard, and good faith negotiations would occur. This has not been the case. The Mayor and School Committee have talked publicly as if things are done and ready for March 15 and April 1, while active negotiations are still proceeding. In and of itself, this shows that the School Committee is not negotiating in good faith. Furthermore, several issues still exist with no resolution:

- Despite references to this proposal as a full, in-person return to learning, the School Committee knows that this is not true. A cohort of remote students will continue to learn from home for numerous reasons – no access to transportation, health concerns, etc. Under the School Committee’s “plan,” these students will receive even *less support than is currently provided*. The nature of the School Committee’s “plan” makes this unavoidable, which is unacceptable. The School Committee must be honest with parents and students about this reality.
- Students with special needs are at risk of being left behind. The plan for implementation of legal services – the least of which is inclusion of our special education student population – has not been completed.
- A recurring problem, class size, will grow. Class sizes are already uneven and bringing in more students will create overcrowding that prohibits recommended social distancing. Keeping students and staff safe requires planning and time. Schedule changes will have to be made.
- Coverage for non-academic times has not been established.
- There remain many spaces which raise ventilation concerns leaving students and staff with nowhere to work.

In closing, while we do not have confidence in the Mayor or School Committee, the BEA is and has always been willing to work with the Central Administration and School Committee for a return to full, in-person learning. We look forward to working together to make sure that the return is one that is well-planned, safe, and sustainable instead of the flawed, rushed, and capricious “plan” that the School Committee continues to tout as done. We hope that with this vote of no confidence, the School Committee will rethink its position for a rushed return and join with the BEA to bargain in good faith and to find a plan that works for all stakeholders. Our staff deserves that. Our community deserves that. Our students deserve that.

Respectfully,

The Braintree Educators Association