Attendees: Toby, Claire, Henry, Emily, May, Melinda, Meaghan, Mark, Janna, Isaac, Joe, Jayla, Beth, Lisa, Leslie, Julie Mc, David F

Agenda:
Icebreaker: Close your eyes and make a wish
Overview Process
- Review Key Insights from Surveys
- External Research Review
- Implications/Direction for Administrators
- Administrators Develop Options (11/5-12)
- Present Options and Give Feedback (11/12)
- Preliminary Report to School Committee (11/16)
- Refine Options (11/16-11/30)
- Final Report (12/2)

Review Key Survey Insights

External Research Review
- Breakouts
- Report of Big Three
- Additional Reports (Door #3, Other districts)

Implications/Direction to Administration --Full group discussion (Toby, Henry, Mark lead)
Based on Obstacles Review, Focus Groups, Surveys, External Research what are the key elements/considerations for Newton in moving forward with expanded in-person learning

Next Steps (what else would we be looking at/doing)

+++

Today is about insights and implications of our learnings so we can give guidance and feedback to the administrators who will develop the plan.

Planning group met this morning, and were struck by something from our conversations to date. One thing that resonated yesterday during the survey result discussion is the importance of the student voice. Between focus groups and surveys, recommendations need to have a student-centered focus to it, and that student voices are the driving factor in our decision making. Parents/teachers are still important, but in the context of the student's needs. Does this resonate? YES across the board.

This is going to be very helpful to us moving forward.

High-level insights from the surveys:

From the close-ended and open-ended survey questions, it is clear that students want to get back into the building for their social and emotional health and well-being. They value and seek greater in-person connection with peers (classmates and friends). At the same time, students are concerned about the health risks associated with COVID-19, and are especially wary of whether peers will use safe distancing practices. A small but significant subset of students don't feel safe returning to the building because of these concerns, along with worries about their health and the well-being of family members.

Students, teachers and parents all rated "social-emotional well-being" and "engaging teaching" as their top two priorities. While "engaging teaching" is a top priority for students, they gave a slightly negative rating to how engaged they feel in classes this year. Staff and parents' ratings of student engagement were higher than students' ratings.

Students rated "in-person contact with peers" as their third priority. The third priorities for parents (challenging academics) and teachers (broad range of courses and electives) were less important to the other two groups.

Students' overall satisfaction with distance learning was slightly negative. They were even more negative about how connected they feel to high school this year, and their perceived sustainability of the current model. They were neutral to slightly negative about their ability to balance school responsibilities with mental health and well-being.

Students favor expanding in-person learning experiences (3.36/5). If public health indicators are favorable, average student ratings are similar (3.37-3.45) with regard to more in-person academic classes, extracurricular activities and social opportunities. While these scores favor expanding in-person options, they are lower than might be expected given the strong overall desire for greater connection. Students' concerns about safe social distancing may be affecting their comfort with in-person learning.

In-person learning is a high priority and more important to parents than it is to students. Conversely, expanded in-person learning is relatively low in importance to teachers, many of whom are not comfortable returning to the building.

Students and teachers do not want to break up their current classes if they shift to hybrid. Parent desires for transition to hybrid are strong enough that they would be willing to disrupt student cohort groupings and teacher assignments if this were the only way to make it happen.

Any other big insights? Kids want what they had before COVID, and we need to have the caveat that there are going to be some things we can't do because of the pandemic. How do we get the adults to listen to each other? Students are saying that when the students speak, the adults should listen. And they are speaking now. Not all kids are in the same place as their parents. Within the recommendation, the whole community needs to have an understanding we aren't going back to pre-COVID, and we have to do education differently. We need to communicate that over and over again. There will be give and take, as well as trade-offs. The

landscape is different in this COVID world, and we have to accept something that is different from pre-Covid. It is what it is. We can't make everyone happy, and it won't be perfect.

Small breakout groups - prepared to share out deep dive information with the larger group

[Note - when reaching out to individual districts to get more in-depth information, Newton promised not to attribute feedback to specific districts or individuals (i.e. teacher, student, administrator or parent). This allowed other districts to be completely honest in their feedback without fearing repercussions. Therefore the meeting minutes reflect this confidentiality, and any identifying information has been removed.]

Cohorting: When splitting cohorts alphabetically, kids were initially upset they weren't with their friends, but got over that fairly quickly because they got to see some peers. Alphabetical cohorting helped keep kids in the same family on the same schedule, helping with family logistics. Wished they could have split their cohort classes more evenly. There has been an increase of students wanting to switch from HyFlex to remote - don't know why.

Technology: Quality of audio when kids zoom in is critical to success. Some districts found that high-end/higher-cost equipment did not necessarily yield high-end results. Having new technology for teachers has helped - laptop, desktop and smartboards. Teachers need a headset, bluetooth speaker and a second laptop. Having a dedicated help desk for technology problems helped shorten technology issues.

Lunch: Varying number of lunch periods across all districts contacted. More lunch blocks allowed for smaller lunch cohort sizes.

Health and safety: 6ft. distancing in the classroom when feasible, others have 4.5-6 ft distancing, which solved their space issues. Mask compliance is high, which helped mitigate fear of distancing being less than 6 feet.   Students are following the rules. Adults monitor the bathrooms, and bathrooms are closed during passing time to prevent students congregating in them. Students scan QR code with their phones when in common areas to help with contact tracing.

Teachers and teaching: More cohorts mean fewer kids in the building, which helped teachers feel more comfortable going in. Teaching a HyFlex model is really hard. Teachers have been innovative and creative despite the challenges of HyFlex teaching. Teachers like having a time when all their students are together, even though they are remote. Teachers are only responsible for teaching their classes and nothing else. Teachers are practical and optimistic - HyFlex is like being a new teacher again. Teachers felt the biggest adjustment came from going from full in-person to full remote in the spring, and that switching from full remote to hybrid was easier. Teachers are tired. Teachers have autonomy in how they structure their long blocks - this has led to some creative teaching, but also inconsistency in content delivery.

Impact on students: Anxiety at the beginning of the year, but things are much better. Students are happy being in the building. Half days in person are tricky for students traveling from Boston. Having a guidance counselor responsible for the remote-only kids has provided much needed support. Maintaining social distancing during student mask breaks can be a challenge. Students are exhausted. Remote students have trouble asking questions during zoomed-in classes. Having an overly complicated schedule is hard for students to manage.

Academic impact: HyFlex is working best for high achieving students. Students who might be struggling, or might need more support are having a harder time. More Ds and Fs reported this fall than usual. Hired 'student supervisors' to be in the building if kids are physically in the building, but their teacher is zooming in remotely. No support time for students in general education - only way to get support is to email your question to the teacher directly. Trying to have in-person break out groups is really hard, because of the 6 foot distancing.

Parent view: Want to stay with hybrid as long as possible. The parents are elated kids are back in school. Unhappy some electives were removed from the schedule.

Lessons and Insights for our administrators before they begin creating options:

- Kids who are learning asynch the first part of the week are not learning as much as the kids who start the week in-person. And then are behind when they start meeting in-person.

- A/B cohorts - make sure we have a pod of teachers and students to give ongoing feedback about how the model is working to give.

- Simplicity - being mindful of making it as easy as possible for teachers.

- Collaborate around this transition and shared best practices

- Let's not sacrifice our flex time. Have a remote day/block just for remote kids

- Interesting that some communities have gotten used to the desks not being too far apart. Especially with the masks in place. Can our community do that? Probably not, but we should be creative.

- We should have a robust FAQ answering as many questions as possible for the community.

- Flexible model where we can adapt to different numbers of kids who are returning and who are remote.

- High-need grouping might be more broadly defined than what has already been defined - can we do full CP classes? Depending on enrollment?

- We need a flex block, no matter what.

- How do we create more supports and structures to make things more equitable.

- Use the lens of what the students need. Students are saying 'we need to be in the building.' Is there anything in the building that doesn't need to be in the building, in order to make more space for students? Adult work that could be in other places. Can we use the old Horace Mann to house adult programs/functions currently housed in the schools?

- How can we have fewer cohorts? How can we be creative when dealing with the space issue?

- More insights can be added to the google drive.