On a warm June day, Mr. Nicholas logged into the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) meeting from his house, full of newfound knowledge about ventilation systems and flushable toilets. The intense meetings - where a 74 page health and safety plan would be developed - were integral to the process of bringing students back into the classroom.

Ever since BISB shut down on March 11th of 2020, Mr. Nicholas and the Senior Leadership Team have been working hard to bring students back in person this school year. For them, remote learning could never be the same as face-to-face learning. With the majority of schools starting remote, the process of reopening BISB was complicated - but the challenge was faced diligently by the SLT.

Mr. Nicholas and the SLT tried to prioritize meeting everyone’s needs. However, it did not take long before they realized how different these were. Because various members of the community had different health and safety concerns, the online learning platform was implemented into the blended learning model going into this school year; all in an effort to accommodate those who did not feel comfortable coming into school.

“With blended learning, it was like we were running several different curricula because each stage within the school will have a different priority,” Mr. Nicholas said. So remote learning for the youngest students will look very different from remote learning for our IB students, for example.”

BISB had to be in constant communication with the state government and health department with their reopening to ensure that they were following the necessary health protocols to keep everyone safe. Mr. Nicholas emphasized the importance of Ems Northey here as the COVID coordinator.

“She was relentless in contacting all of the public health departments to the point where we were a hundred percent satisfied that by opening the school, we weren't bringing anyone at risk,” Mr. Nicholas said, “And then to keep us open, she called upon the expertise within the community as well, bringing in the expertise of a lot of parents who know far more than we do.”

The implementation of all the safety equipment posed a logistical nightmare. BISB began by upgrading all of their ventilation systems and purchasing large amounts of other equipment including PPE and table dividers. Purchasing all this equipment took the entire summer, and formed part of the intricate, COVID-specific knowledge obtained by Mr. Nicholas.

Mr. Nicholas and the Senior Leadership Team drafted an extremely comprehensive plan to keep everyone safe, and Mr. Nicholas highlighted the immense difference between planning the safety measures and actually implementing them.

“I can write policy after policy, but it takes the whole community to implement it with everyone on board.”

Originally, Nicholas did not expect to keep all of the safety measures in place for very long.

“If we went back to June last year, when we started the implementation plan, and you said to me, we would still be wearing masks, being socially distanced, and have all of the safety equipment in place in March, then I would have said, don't be ridiculous.”

Mr. Nicholas understands the extent to which academics had been affected by the pandemic. He is proud of the resilience of students, teachers, and the community. Whether it was launching our online learning system immediately after the school’s closure, or the community adapting to social distancing rules, BISB has continued this seamless adoption of pandemic standards- where the need for certain staff and students to quarantine has not hindered the learning.

The extremely tight community at BISB was what originally brought Nicholas over to Boston, what he cherished in his time here, and what he will miss most when he has to depart this year. He acknowledged that this school year has been a huge transition for everyone involved. He felt that everyone in the community has risen to meet these new challenges. He talked about his appreciation that the school community was aligned around one goal: keeping the school open all year.

Nicholas described the most difficult impact of COVID on the school community.

“We pride ourselves on the open door policy that we have, where the parents can come into school and we have regular conversations over coffee mornings,” he said. “So having the door closed to parents has been very hard for us as a school.”

Mr. Nicholas was stunned by the way the pandemic has changed education, and he believes the changes are here to stay.

“I would have never thought that I would have such a vast knowledge of teams and one note,” Nicholas said. “Hardly anyone’s heard of Zoom last year, and now it's probably part of the English dictionary. So the world has changed and I don't believe education will go back to the way it was before.”

Mr. Nicholas’ biggest takeaway from the pandemic for education is the need for teachers to have an adaptable approach to teaching.

“So the way that the young people have managed this global catastrophe, has shown me how important it is that we prepare them for adult life, in whatever format that will be,” he said. “If you can overcome the pandemic, then you can be creative when everything else is on a level playing field.”

