



SCHOOL DISTRICT OF THE CHATHAMS

Office of the Superintendent

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Dear Parent,

I hope this letter finds you and your family well and enjoying the spring weather. At last night's Board of Education meeting, I gave a presentation about our plans for this spring, as well as preparations for summer programming and the annual school budget. I invite you to watch [the presentation](#) if you have time. If you cannot do so, below are some of the key points that I was trying to convey.

CDC Guidance

As you likely know, the CDC released revised guidance for schools last Friday. It is important to understand that public school districts in New Jersey, at least within the context of the current pandemic and what we are required to do in order to operate our schools, are not accountable to the CDC. We are accountable to the New Jersey Department of Education and the New Jersey Department of Health. As such, we are now waiting for these agencies to evaluate the latest CDC guidance and then supply us with updated rules. Some of the key changes from the CDC are:

- 3 feet of physical distancing is recommended if all students and staff are masked and if community transmission levels are "low, moderate, or substantial."
- 6 feet of physical distancing is recommended for secondary students if community transmission levels are "high."

Some of the key elements of the CDC guidance that have remained UNCHANGED:

- 6 feet of distance is the unit of measurement applied to positive cases in order to identify close contacts and mandatory quarantines.
- 6 feet of distance is recommended in all situations where students do not wear masks.
- 6 feet of distance is recommended for all adults.

SDOC Plans for the Final Quarter of the Year

Unlike many other school districts, we are fortunate to be able to say that the overwhelming majority of our students (85% - 90%) continue to choose to attend school in-person. Due to the high rates of attendance we have, the distancing recommendations noted above mean that it continues to be impractical, if not impossible, at the present time to provide lunch to students in the school setting. That

could change at some point in the future, but at present that is not achievable. However, the anticipated adoption of the CDC guidance by the NJDOH will enable us to plan for two changes:

1. The return to five days of in-person instruction per week for our students in grades 6-12
2. Additional special events and social activities at all grade levels that can rely on 3 feet of space in masks and 6 feet of space without masks.

Timeline for Changes

We are preparing to implement the above changes along the following timelines:

- April 19: Students in Grades 8 and 12 return to school every day.
- April 26: Students in Grades 6 and 9 return to school every day.
- April 28: Students Grades 7, 10, and 11 return to school every day.
- May 3 - June 15: All schools will work to provide additional, outdoor social events and activities for students to interact with one another.
 - May occur during or after school.
 - May entail food/lunch.
 - Virtual hours of instruction may be canceled on these days.
 - Details will follow from schools.

PLEASE NOTE that the above changes are dependent on the COVID case rate in our community and in our schools, and additional verification with the local Departments of Health. We have experienced a marked [INCREASE in cases](#) in the school district over the past month, and we will monitor our cases prior to finalizing these changes. Bringing more students into school every day and enabling more students to interact with wider groups will translate into additional quarantines due to the fact that the 6 feet of distance is the required unit of measurement in the identification of close contacts.

The reason we are staggering the return of cohorts is to better adjust to the movement and congregation of students during the school day and at arrival and dismissal. We are prioritizing our Grades 8 and 12 students because they have only a couple of months remaining at their respective schools.

If we make the above changes and we find that we have ongoing cases leading to excessive quarantines, we will pull back and return to the current hybrid schedule we have been operating in Grades 6-12 all year.

Spring Break and Quarantine

At the current time, the New Jersey Department of Health continues to maintain a quarantine period for all individuals who travel out of state (beyond CT, NY, PA, and DE). The parameters of the travel quarantine are as follows:

- 10 days upon return to New Jersey OR
- 7 days upon return to New Jersey with documentation of a negative PCR test taken 3-5 days after return.

If you are traveling beyond CT, NY, PA, or DE during spring break, your child will need to quarantine upon return. I hope that the travel rules change by April 11. If they do, and if New Jersey goes in the direction of some other states, then quarantine may be unnecessary. But, at the present time, this is the rule and I have double-verified with our local Departments of Health that we must follow it.

At the present time, the expectation is that all schools will remain open for in-person instruction the week after spring break. The only reason this would change is if it becomes impossible for us to adequately staff a school due to staff quarantines.

All-Virtual Instruction

Over the past several months, we have experienced a great degree of volatility in students choosing to be all-virtual and then wanting to return to school at different times. Effective April 19, any student opting for all-virtual instruction will be placed in that format for 60 days, or through the end of the year. This will help us stabilize the populations in our classrooms and it will also enable us to adjust schedules at the middle and high schools so that when/if we return more students to school every day we are able to ensure a minimum of three feet of space between students.

PLEASE NOTE that a student who needs to quarantine due to exposure to COVID or travel is not considered an all-virtual student. Students who must quarantine may return to school when the quarantine period is over and their parents have been in contact with the school nurse. “All-Virtual” students refer to those students who voluntarily select to attend school virtually. If you would like to place your child on all-virtual instruction, [please complete this form](#). If your child is already an all-virtual student, you do not need to complete the form again, but understand that your child will remain on all-virtual instruction through the end of the year unless you return her/him to in-person school prior to April 19.

Mental Health Support

This has been a difficult and stressful year on our students, and we know that a number of students continue to struggle with the mental health effects of this pandemic. We have initiated a new program to match students in need with a licensed mental health professional in our school district to engage in teletherapy sessions. If you believe your child could benefit from additional support from a mental health professional, please complete [this referral form](#).

COVID Testing

We are in the process of finalizing a partnership with Atlantic Health Systems to offer COVID testing for staff members and students who might want it. I will share details with you once they are finalized, but we are preliminarily looking at offering testing at Chatham Middle School every Friday between the hours of 1:00 and 3:00 pm. The testing would be for asymptomatic individuals who may need a test if they have traveled or are concerned about exposure. I hope to have the final arrangements within the week.

End-of-Year Events

We are currently planning year-end events, such as high school graduation, with hopes that the rules surrounding these events will be updated and provided by the Governor or DOE soon. We of course want

to create a positive end of this school year for students and allow them to participate in activities and events that will be both memorable and safe. Please be patient with our schools as we continue to work on these issues as the guidance given to us evolves.

Thank You

Thank you for continuing to do everything you have done all year to help us deliver as best an educational experience to our students as possible under the current circumstances. Many of you have exercised your voices to press for vaccine access for our staff, and I can say at the present time that the majority of our staff is somewhere in the vaccine pipeline. This is wonderful news and should enable us to accomplish more as we move forward. All of you have also sacrificed time and endured many ups and downs over the past twelve months. I am hopeful that we are entering into brighter days, the best days of this school year are ahead of us, and next year school will be much more “normal.” Enjoy the upcoming spring break!

Sincerely,

Michael LaSusa

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