



SCHOOL DISTRICT OF THE CHATHAMS

Office of the Superintendent

Michael LaSusa

mlasusa@chatham-nj.org

259 Lafayette Avenue, Chatham, NJ 07928

(973) 457-2501

April 13, 2021

Dear Parent,

I hope that your children enjoyed a restful spring break and that they are returning for the final stretch of the school year with some extra pep in their step. Since I last wrote to you at the end of March, the New Jersey Department of Health has adopted a number of important changes that will impact the schools. Below are the most impactful changes, as well as some other updates regarding various school-related issues.

First and foremost, the NJDOH has incorporated recent guidance issued by the CDC regarding physical distancing in classrooms. Specifically, the new guidance allows for elementary students to be spaced three feet apart in classrooms regardless of the level of COVID transmission in the community and allows for secondary students to be spaced three feet apart in classrooms IF the level of transmission in the community is at either a "Low" or "Moderate" level. If the level of community transmission is either "High" or "Very High," then a school district cannot drop down to three feet of physical distancing within secondary classrooms. The NJDOH has used a [Covid Activity Level Index](#) (CALI) throughout this school year to assess the level of community transmission in the various regions of New Jersey. Morris County falls within the Northwest Region. As you can see by clicking on the above link or looking at the attached spreadsheet, the Northwest region has remained in a "High" level of transmission for about six consecutive weeks now. This means that we CANNOT drop down to three feet of physical distancing for our secondary students. Due to the fact that we have approximately 90% of students now attending school in person, the "High" level of community transmission prohibits the district from moving forward with our plan to bring students in grades 6-12 back to school every day.

Therefore, we WILL NOT move forward with the timeline for that change that we had previously communicated. We will CONTINUE TO MONITOR the level of transmission in our region and CONTINUE to operate CMS and CHS on an A/B cohort schedule. When the level of transmission declines and reaches the "Moderate" or "Low" stage for two consecutive weeks, we will assess the plans to bring students in grades 6-12 back to school every day. I know that this might be disappointing to some students and families, but we do not have a choice given the updated rules and the high percentage of students we have who attend school in person. Our goal will remain to have all of our students attend school every day, but enacting that change at the secondary level will depend primarily on the level of

transmission in the community and secondarily on the timing of when our region drops back down into the "Moderate" or "Low" range of transmission.

Despite the fact that we cannot enact the next step in our plan at the present time, Atlantic Health System is still on board to offer weekly COVID testing for any asymptomatic staff member or student who would like it. AHS will be on site at Chatham Middle School every Friday from 1:00 - 3:00 pm, beginning on April 23, to provide this service. Please see the attached flyer for more details and use [this link](#) with the code "Chatham" to schedule an appointment if you would like.

The NJDOH has also released new guidelines for fully vaccinated individuals. While this does not affect most students in the district at this point, beginning this Monday all New Jersey residents aged 16 and over will be eligible for vaccination. Fully vaccinated individuals (those who are two weeks beyond their final vaccine dose) no longer must quarantine due to travel or exposure. This will mean that students over the age of 16 who have been fully vaccinated will not be subject to quarantine during the final months of the year if they are exposed to a positive individual or if they have traveled.

Similarly, individuals who have tested positive for COVID in the past 90 days will no longer need to quarantine after travel or exposure to a positive individual.

Next, as you know, unvaccinated individuals who travel beyond the immediate region (PA, NY, CT, DE) may shorten their quarantine from ten to seven days if they receive a negative PCR test result between 3-5 days after they have returned from travel. If your child recently traveled beyond the immediate region and you plan to reduce their quarantine from ten to seven days with a negative PCR test, please communicate and document that result with your child's school nurse. Based on our surveys prior to the break, we believe we have somewhere between 500 and 600 students who traveled last week, so please be patient as our school nurses try to work through all of the correspondence they are receiving right now.

As a reminder, we have changed the commitment for virtual learning to be at least 60 days beginning on Monday, April 19. If you have elected for your child to be an all-virtual student as of Monday, they will remain fully virtual through the balance of the year. We are making this adjustment to help reduce the volatility in attendance that we have experienced in recent months.

Finally, we received notice last week from the New Jersey Department of Education that the spring administration of the NJSLA is canceled for this year. This means that we will not have to contend with any disruptions to scheduling over the next two months as a result of testing, except at the high school as a result of AP administration in May and June.

Finally, finally, the NJDOE and NJDOH have not released any guidance at all yet about next school year. We are fully expecting to have "normal" school days for all students next year, but we are planning for other contingencies in case we are still dealing with restrictions that make typical school days impossible. I will communicate our plans for next year as soon as we receive guidance for next year and have the opportunity to plan off of that guidance.

Thank you for your attention to all of the above and your ongoing flexibility. We are in the final homestretch of the year and it is my sincerest hope that students enjoy a spring filled with learning and exciting activities.

Sincerely,

Michael LaSusa

Michael LaSusa