



SCHOOL DISTRICT OF THE CHATHAMS

Office of the Superintendent

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Dear Parent,

I hope this letter finds you and your families well as we approach the July 4 holiday. I am writing to update you on our reopening plans. As many of you know, the New Jersey Department of Education released [guidance](#) on Friday. This publication has generated a number of questions among school districts, but it settles two issues:

1. Schools in New Jersey will reopen for in-person instruction in the fall.
2. All students will be required to wear a face covering when physical distancing of 6 feet is not possible (unless prohibited from doing so because of a medical condition).

Apart from the above, I want to share with you the [American Academy of Pediatrics](#) guidelines for opening schools and ask that you please read them. I have long consulted the AAP for guidance on issues affecting students, including substance use, sleep needs, and screen time, and rely on this organization to help shape my own thinking about critical matters. Among their stated positions regarding the reopening of schools are the following:

1. “All policy considerations for the coming school year should start with a goal of having students physically present in school.”
2. The negative implications and consequences of not having students in school every day must be weighed against the current evidence about how Covid-19 affects school-aged children.
3. Schools should consider a physical distancing standard for pupils of 3 feet, with face coverings, as feasible, which is the same standard set by the World Health Organization.
4. The needs of students receiving special education programming demand the utmost priority and must be weighed alongside any virus mitigation measures.

All committees of our Board of Education and various teams of our district leadership staff have been meeting over the past two months to generate plans for reopening our schools. Our core goal is for all students to be in school as much as possible while preserving the safety of all students and staff in the school environment. In addition, the recent parent survey regarding virtual learning indicated that approximately 90% of parents intend to send their children to school in the fall. Based on all of these

discussions and feedback, we are developing a full plan that we will share with you by the end of this month. However, in order to provide you with as much time as possible to make arrangements and prepare for the coming year, I want to share with you now our intentions regarding reopening plans. Please note that these are just the basic tenets of these plans (there will be many pages of details to follow) and that all intended plans will be subject to additional input and approvals from the local Departments of Health and the Department of Education.

Our Plan A for return will entail the following:

1. Schools will be open to all students every day, on a modified schedule.
2. The modified schedule will roughly follow a two-hour early dismissal schedule.
3. Parents may opt to have their children remain on virtual instruction.
4. Teachers will livestream what is taking place in the front of the room so that students who remain on virtual instruction may follow along with the class from home.
5. Special Education programming will be based on each child's IEP and may entail supplemental and extended programming.

Schools will follow a two-hour early dismissal schedule when the year begins for a number of reasons. First, we will not be serving lunch in school. Congregating large numbers of students in lunchrooms is problematic and so is having students eat lunch in classrooms, as it requires the removal of face coverings and the potential introduction of allergens. Second, the abbreviated day will allow teachers to devote a certain amount of time to virtual instruction to supplement the in-person and remote learning taking place during the day. Third, the earlier dismissal of students will provide additional time to sanitize the school buildings on a daily basis.

We recognize that an early dismissal schedule is a hardship for some families. We are currently in discussion with our childcare provider, The Work-Family Connection, to offer additional support for families who need childcare after the school day ends.

Schools operate a wide range of classroom settings, including science labs, small group instruction spaces, classrooms of various square footage based on age of buildings, and so forth. **We will strive to create 3-6 feet of physical distancing whenever possible, but we will require face coverings for all students while in classrooms, hallways, and other areas.** Again, accommodations will be made for students with certain medical or other conditions that preclude the use of face coverings, and we are also in the process of securing face shields for student use. We will also implement additional physical spacing measures in classrooms, hallways, and other spaces. Finally, we will create additional time during the day to allow for handwashing, mask “breaks,” snack, and physical movement between rooms.

Transportation is a challenge for a variety of reasons. All students who ride a bus will be required to wear a face covering. **When schools open this fall, the district will not offer subscription busing.** We know that this is a hardship for families who have relied on this service. For this reason, we wanted to communicate this to you as early as possible. We will seek to maintain as much distance as possible on school buses, but 3-6 feet of space may not be possible on most routes most of the time.

We will develop a policy and communicate it to you by the end of the month regarding health screenings for students on a daily basis. This will likely involve parents confirming each day that their child is free from fever and other symptoms of illness. We will require that any child exhibiting symptoms of illness remain home from school. Those children may tap into the livestream of the classroom if they are well enough to do so.

I reiterate that Plan A must still gain approval from other authorities, but the Board of Education and I wanted to share with you some of its features as early as possible so that you have time this summer to prepare. It is also possible that Plan A might not be feasible if the health conditions in our community change between now and the end of August.

If Plan A is not possible, then we will move to Plan B. Plan B will be similar in structure to Plan A, but will rotate cohorts of students in and out of school on either a daily or weekly basis in order to reduce the number of students in school at once. When students are not in school, they will be expected to tune in to the livestream in their classrooms. While this will make more physical distancing possible, it will also be more disruptive to student learning and working parents. In this scenario, certain kinds of special education programming will likely remain in-person every day, consistent with Plan A.

Plan C is full virtual instruction for everyone, but will follow a schedule and structure similar to the above plans with live interaction between students and teachers every day.

Plan A+ would be a full, normal return to school. We will move to Plan A+ if Plan A goes well, the health conditions in the community remain excellent, and so forth.

All plans will depend upon input, guidance, and direction from the New Jersey and local Departments of Health.

To prepare for this coming year, there are a few actions you can take now. First, while we understand some of the hardships involved in anything less than a 100% return to school, we ask that you begin to make arrangements to help us bring students to school every day with safeguards and virus mitigation strategies in place. We ask that you please begin to create mask or face covering “endurance” with your children. Please find reusable/washable face coverings that your child is comfortable wearing and gradually build up the amount of time they can tolerate wearing them. Next, please ensure that you have a working thermometer in your home, personal supplies of hand sanitizer (alcohol-based) that your child can carry to school, and any other personal effects that you think will help your child feel comfortable back in a school environment. We will communicate additional information about health and hygiene practices at the end of the month, but these small steps now will help in the fall, regardless of the type of Plan we implement.

I know that this is a lot to digest and may be subject to change. This note is not meant to be comprehensive. Our full plan will address many other issues and considerations with respect to school routines, instruction and assessment, curricular resources, technology support, health and hygiene

practices, and more. We will deliver this information to you by the end of the month, but wanted to provide you with a sense of our direction.

Thank you and I hope you have a nice holiday weekend.

Sincerely,

Michael LaSusa