



SCHOOL DISTRICT OF THE CHATHAMS

Office of the Superintendent

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Dear Parent,

I hope this letter finds you well. I am writing to you for two reasons. First, I would like to provide a little more information regarding our three Plans for the resumption of school. Second, I would ask that you please [complete this survey](#) after reading this letter. The survey is very brief and asks whether, at this time, you plan to send your child to school if we are in a position to implement Plan A. If you answer NO to that question, we would like to know if you would plan to send your child to school if we instead implement Plan B. The reason we are seeking this information is that knowing which students will not attend school physically in the fall will enable us to better and more efficiently schedule class sections and create physical distance inside our classrooms for next year. Please complete this survey at your earliest convenience, but no later than

I shared with you on July 2 that we are working off of three Plans at the present time. These plans aim to incorporate guidance from the [American Academy of Pediatrics](#), the [World Health Organization](#), the [National Academies of Science, Engineering, and Medicine](#), and the [CDC](#). Even though some of the guidelines conflict with one another, all of the organizations acknowledge the critical role schools play in our society and emphasize the importance of having students in school every day. Our starting point remains that students should participate in in-person school every day. However, our starting point may not be our end point. In the 18 days since I last emailed you, states across our country have reported increasing cases of Covid-19, the Ivy and Patriot Leagues have canceled their fall athletic seasons, and major cities in other states have announced either hybrid (our Plan B) or full remote (our Plan C) instruction come the fall. **So we have to be ready to implement any plan based on the conditions and developments we face.** The start of the school year is six weeks away and even more can change by then.

In terms of some of those conditions, it fortunately has remained the case that Chatham Borough and Chatham Township continue to report very few confirmed cases of Covid-19 over the past six weeks or so. The state of New Jersey has one of the lowest positivity rates in the country right now. And to date, of the 15,000+ fatalities caused by Covid-19 in our state, not one of them has been in a person between the ages of 5 and 17, according to the [New Jersey Department of Health](#). This is all relatively good news, though it does not mean that Covid-19 is not serious and it certainly does not mean that adults run the

same risks as children. Accounting for the health risks to our staff is of critical importance in evaluating how we move forward.

Here is where we are in terms of our three plans. This is still preliminary and all bullets may be subject to change. I have had conversations with our local department of health officials, but the Department of Education has yet to establish our next steps in terms of plan approval and implementation.

Plan A

- All students will report to school each day. The school day will begin at the normal time but end two hours earlier than normal. There will be no lunch served at school.
- All students and staff will be required to wear face coverings (i.e. masks), unless they have a medically documented respiratory or other condition. In that case, they will be required to wear a face shield.
- Students will be spaced 3-6 feet apart from one another. In most full sized classes, the distance will be about 3 feet.
- A space of between 6-10 feet will be created in the front of the room to space staff from students as much as possible.
- In grades 1-5, ELA and Math will be prioritized over other subject areas in terms of in-person instruction.
- In grades 6-12, the schedule will likely entail a four-period day to reduce the amount of transition time in the hallways.
- Transition time will increase and students will be dismissed/transition through hallways based on wing of building and/or grade level.
- Teachers will utilize streaming and video software during class to enable students who are at home to follow along during the lesson.

Plan B

- All of the above remains in effect, with the following changes.
- Only about 50% of students will be in attendance on a given day.
- The student body will be split in half according to the first letter of their last name so that siblings throughout the district remain on the same schedule.
- Students will be spaced 3-6 feet apart from one another; with roughly 50% of students in attendance, the distance in most classrooms will approach about 6 feet.
- All students with an IEP will have the option of attending school every day.
- In grades 6-12, the in-person schedule will likely convert to having all class periods meet each day so that students are seeing all of their teachers in person each day they are in school.
- Transition time may increase, but not as much as in Plan A, because it will be easier to move only 50% of the student body through the school in an orderly manner.

Plan C

- Students will receive full virtual instruction.
- Each school will have a set schedule and teachers and students will follow that schedule, with live interaction taking place each day.

- There may be individual or special circumstances in which some students may report to school.

I need to apprise you of some additional significant details. First, we have made the decision that **we will NOT run Full-Day Kindergarten this school year**. We know that this is very disappointing to many and we do not come to this decision lightly. After much analysis and consideration, we have concluded that it is necessary to have an abbreviated schedule at all grade levels because 1) lunch is problematic for a number of reasons and 2) we need increased time in all school buildings to disinfect and sanitize classrooms and other areas. In addition, our largest class sections at the K-5 level were in full-day kindergarten and this made physical distancing more challenging. Converting all of our kindergarten sections to our typical half-day program we will reduce the class sizes overall for learners at this level (which will assist with physical distancing inside the classroom). We will provide refunds to all families who were planning on the full-day program and our principals will be in touch with those families with regard to scheduling for next year.

At the same time, **we will operate our half-day Pre-K and half-day Kindergarten programs as we have done in the past**. This means that our Pre-K and K students, who comprise our 3-5 year-old populations, will follow our traditional schedule from years past and not be on the same abbreviated, two-hour early dismissal schedule of the rest of our students. The reasons we have made this decision are that 1) trying to reduce these programs to only about two hours in length and squeeze them into an abbreviated day would mean that their programs would become inadequately brief; and 2) we would not have enough time to thoroughly sanitize the classrooms in between sessions.

Let me also elaborate on a few items that are relevant for some or all of the plans.

First and foremost, I understand that many parents have trepidations about returning to school. I have spoken at length with both of our public health officers (Borough and Township) and they have told me that they believe that Plan A is reasonable and makes sense based on current conditions. They have also told me that we need to acknowledge that it is not possible to eliminate all risk of Covid exposure, regardless of which Plan we implement. We need to layer in protective measures to reduce virus transmission, but we will never be able to definitively eliminate all risk.

In addition to face coverings and the spacing of student desks/tables, we are purchasing “desk partitions” similar to the one in the attached photos for student work areas across the district. The health officers indicated that this is a good mitigation strategy. We are also attempting to schedule every full-size class (18-24 students) in a room with a window. There are some places where this is impossible, like an interior computer lab with hardwired machines and furniture, but our principals are creatively looking at all spaces in the schools, including the gyms and auditoriums, to house classes so that we can place as many classes as possible in rooms with windows or utilize large spaces with a lot of air volume. We are probably right now at a point where 90% of our class sections are scheduled in spaces with windows. We are trying to move as close as we can to 100%, though we will not be able to achieve that. We have over 1,000 class sections between CMS and CHS alone, for example, and we utilize many spaces without windows. One of the reasons we are asking you to complete the survey is that it will help us determine which sections may have fewer students so that we can make adjustments to the placement of sections.

For those classrooms that do not have windows, I can tell you that we have fresh air exchange in every classroom in the district. We are in the process of trying to upgrade all of the filters in our HVAC units to MERV-13 high efficiency filters. I will apprise you if we are able to do that by the start of the year, but it is complicated because our oldest building is almost 100 years old and our newest building is more than 50 years old. We have a combination of rooftop units and individual classroom units. All of our schools have had additions put on them and HVAC systems replaced. Some units actually require custom-made filters. Our maintenance staff is working as fast as they can to attempt to obtain higher efficiency filters.

One of our strategies for both Plans A and B will be to open all windows in every classroom and also encourage teachers to bring classes outdoors. Our principals are working on placing furniture outdoors and we may purchase additional equipment to help make this possible. This means that staff and children might not be working in a perfect 70-degree environment. However, there will be as much fresh air in the building as possible.

All classrooms in the district will be outfitted with hand sanitizer and wipes when the year begins. At the pre-K-5 level, students will largely remain in their own classrooms throughout the day and they will not mix with other classes of students. At all levels, we will attempt to reduce the sharing of common objects. However, if schools are in session under Plan A or Plan B, it will not be realistic to think that every item a student might touch (door handle, desk, chair, faucet handle, books or writing implements in the classroom, etc. etc.) will be disinfected after every use. When students are in school, they touch common items. We will be disinfecting our schools thoroughly each day, which is one of the reasons for the two-hour early dismissal schedule, but it will not be possible to sanitize every space and item after every use throughout the day. For this reason, it is critical that students practice good hand hygiene. We ask that you please purchase personal hand sanitizer (alcohol-based) for your child and reinforce good hand hygiene with them now.

Some parents have asked me about contact tracing. I have been advised by Department of Education officials that contact tracing decisions will be made by the Department of Health and that we must remain in close contact with the public health officers if we have a case of Covid-19. One of our public health officers did inform me that they consider a "close contact" to be someone who has spent more than ten minutes of time within 6 feet of a person who tests positive. We will work closely with our public health officials as our schools reopen and we will follow their direction.

There are a few ways that I would ask you to begin to prepare for whatever is coming our way right now.

First and foremost, please begin to have your child wear a face covering/mask for greater and greater periods of time. I have recently had cause to be in a face covering for 3+ hours without a break. It takes time to get used to doing that. Students will be required to wear a mask at all times in the classroom and in hallways. Please begin NOW to have your child become comfortable in a mask.

Next, and I am asking this on behalf of our school nurses, please consider getting your child the seasonal flu shot before the school year begins. Covid-19 is challenging enough. If we can try to reduce other

forms of illness that might surface in our student body, that will help us better deal with Covid-19. This of course is a personal choice, but we ask you to consider it.

If you are planning to travel to a state with high rates of transmission as identified by the state of New Jersey, please understand that your child will have to quarantine for 14 days and will not be able to report to school if your travel occurred within the two weeks of school beginning.

As you might imagine, this pandemic has consumed every part of my life in recent weeks and months. I am reading all of the articles, op-eds, Facebook posts from teachers and parents all around the state and country, and everything else that you are. There are no easy or quick solutions to the challenges we face. Please know that I read every email that I receive from a parent, but that recently I have been unable to respond to each of them because of time demands. I appreciate your messages, even if I am not as responsive as I normally am.

This is a fragile moment and if we all work together to make good choices and protect one another to the greatest extent possible, our children will have a better chance of experiencing school as it is meant to be experienced. I am thinking right now like a professional baseball manager who abides by the principle that every game counts. I believe that every day, or week, we can conduct in-person instruction for students, counts. We need to try to create the conditions for as many of these days to count as possible. I will continue to keep you informed as our plans progress and we respond to the conditions in the community and the feedback we receive from the Departments of Health and Education.

I wish you the best and thank you in advance for [completing the survey](#).

Sincerely,

Mike LaSusa