



SCHOOL DISTRICT OF THE CHATHAMS

Office of the Superintendent

Michael LaSusa

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September 4, 2020

Dear Parent,

School will open to students on Tuesday, September 8. Thank you for your patience and understanding as we have addressed final preparations for the start of the school year. The following are some final updates as we welcome your children back into the school buildings.

- The Department of Education has approved our reopening plan and confirmed that it meets all health and safety requirements. Our classrooms and other spaces reflect these measures, with desk shields installed throughout the schools, extraneous furniture removed from classrooms to create more space, markers and signs in hallways to indicate traffic flow, and additional precautions.
- The New Jersey Department of Health updated its weekly [COVID-19 Activity Level Report](#) today. For the fourth consecutive week, the region covering Morris County is designated as “Low” in terms of virus activity. The case rate for our region is 3.0 per 100,000 people and the percent positivity rate is 1.77%.
- We have received guidance this week from our local health departments that **gaiters are NOT recommended for indoor use**. Your child must wear a face covering (please see attachment). Again, there will be no exemptions to the use of face coverings unless a student suffers from a documented medical condition that has been verified by our school district physician. Students unable or unwilling to wear a face covering may be removed from the school environment and may be placed on virtual instruction.
- All parents will be required to complete a daily health screening form, found in the Genesis Parent Portal, on a daily basis. This is a necessary inconvenience and I ask you to please find a routine for its completion that works for you. You can save the page to your cell phone or do something else that makes this quick and easy each morning. Thank you in advance for your cooperation here. This is one of the DOE requirements noted above and the questions and content of this form has been taken from the New Jersey Department of Health. We are fielding questions about the form and its content, and we will address them through an FAQ on our

website in the coming days. Like everything else, this is new and something that we will continue to work through.

- I would like to acknowledge the Chatham Education Association for being collaborative throughout this summer and dedicated to opening our classrooms physically to all students. I have met at least weekly with the Co-Presidents of the Association--one an elementary level teacher and one a high school teacher--to work through challenges and devise creative solutions. Just yesterday, we toured all of our schools together for approximately four hours, along with the President of the Board of Education and other district staff, to review final details and exchange ideas and questions. Without our teachers and the CEA leadership, we would not be in a position to open schools today. With respect to homeroom teaching positions at the PK-5 level, we are fully staffed with certified teachers. At the 6-12 level, we are about 95% staffed with certified teachers, due in part to leave requests we have received only in the past ten days or so. We will be employing some creative coverage of classes for the handful of teachers for whom we do not yet have a replacement and will continue to ensure that all positions are staffed as soon as possible. I will also share that last year we began the year with 34 new teaching staff members and the year before we began with 35. This year, we are at 45, with a few possible leaves pending. While this is an increase, it is not as large an increase as some other districts have experienced and we have systems in place to orient new teachers to our district and provide them with the resources and training they need to be successful.
- Please be patient as we work through the first days or weeks of school. We know that the traffic will be heavier than normal around the schools due to a reduction in the number of students being bused. We also know that students will need time to adjust to new routines and expectations, especially with regard to maintaining distance from one another while navigating the new procedures for entering and exiting the school building. This will be a process and we are aiming for incremental progress each day.

Thank you for the support you have given your children and the understanding you have shown the school district in recent months. We have come a long way since March. We still have a long way to go, and plenty of uncertainty to go with it, but we are putting one foot in front of the other. I wish your children and your families a safe, happy, and rewarding school year.

Sincerely,

Michael LaSusa

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