



SCHOOL DISTRICT OF THE CHATHAMS

Office of the Superintendent

Michael LaSusa

mlasusa@chatham-nj.org

259 Lafayette Avenue, Chatham, NJ 07928

(973) 457-2501

December 15, 2020

Dear Parent or Staff Member,

I am writing to update you on the plans for the Chatham schools over the next several weeks.

First, there is a winter storm warning in effect for tomorrow and into Thursday. As it stands right now, we will open school tomorrow and commit to completing the day. However, we will cancel all afternoon virtual sessions and meetings. In other words, when the school day ends tomorrow, there will be no additional virtual log-ins. In addition, our afternoon kindergarten and pre-K sessions are canceled for tomorrow. We recognize that our afternoon K and PK sessions did not meet the day before Thanksgiving. However, those sessions will meet next Wednesday and also this Thursday (see below) so that there is parity between the morning and afternoon sessions.

Thursday will be an all-virtual school day, with synchronous schedules taking place in all schools.

We will operate ONLY our afternoon kindergarten and pre-K sessions on Thursday, with morning sessions canceled. There will be no “virtual hours” and meetings in the afternoon. Again, this means that once the school day ends, there will be no additional virtual log-ins. Building principals will confirm schedules with you later today or tomorrow. As this will be our first attempt at holding virtual school on a day with inclement weather, it will be a learning experience for everyone. Please be flexible and understanding as we try this out, and recognize that what we learn will make the experience better the next time.

I understand that there are strong feelings about “snow days.” The fact that we will implement virtual learning on Thursday does not mean that there will be no snow days or other days off this year. I will consider each day on a case-by-case basis. For this first snowstorm, we are one week away from the longest break of the school year, we have the opportunity to plan for the day in advance, and both our middle school and high school have recently suffered disruptions to in-person learning. I prefer not to expend a snow day right now, as it could be helpful to have all of our days as we enter 2021. We might be hit with additional storms. We might lose power unexpectedly. We might have to close school for a day to administer vaccines to our staff at some point. We have four snow days built into our calendar as extra days and all of them must be used by the end of the year--either as snow days or as other cancellations of school--so the final number of school days this year will be 180 regardless of when these

“days off” occur. I am hopeful that back-to-back days on Wednesday and Thursday without virtual log-ins will provide some extra time in the snow for students while still maintaining the momentum of learning.

After the snow falls and is cleared, we will return to in-person learning through Wednesday, December 23. Winter break will take place from Thursday, December 24 through Sunday, January 3. **We are converting the week of January 4 - January 8 to all-virtual instruction at all schools.** We are making this adjustment because we have been made aware of many students and some staff members who will travel over the break. We have been stretched extremely thin all year long from a staffing perspective, and the quarantines required for travel out of state will be extremely difficult for us to manage. In addition, if past experience is any kind of predictor, we will almost certainly have some staff and certainly some students who come down with illness after the holiday break. This may be COVID-related or may simply be the typical illness we experience in January. Either way, this will also adversely impact us from a staffing perspective and make it more difficult to operate our buildings within the existing framework and protocols of the Department of Health. When we returned from Thanksgiving break, for example, we almost immediately had to convert our high school to virtual instruction. I am hopeful that by providing an extra week of at-home learning after break, it will then be more likely that all of our schools are able to remain open once we return.

As a result of the above, and in an effort to provide a degree of certainty and planning time for all families and staff, we will implement all-virtual schedules at our schools the week following the break, with a **return to in-person instruction on Monday, January 11.** Principals will communicate additional information to you about the schedule for each school building. In-person extra-curricular activities will also be suspended during this time.

As has been the case with everything in 2020, the above could change. If there are widespread power outages this week, for example, then it might not be possible to hold virtual instruction on Thursday. If regional COVID conditions worsen over the next several weeks, then the Department of Health might advise us to do something different in January. For now, though, the above reflects our plans in the coming weeks.

I hope that you are able to find comfort and enjoyment with your family during the coming break. Thank you sincerely for making lemonade from lemons so far this school year.

Sincerely,

Michael LaSusa