July 18, 2020

Dear Fair Lawn Community,

With seven weeks remaining before the start of the 2020-2021 school year, I am writing to provide you an update on our preliminary plans for reopening schools in the fall. While many aspects of school life will look different, our primary goal is to have the students and staff return safely this coming school year and to adapt as necessary to meet the current circumstances.

As we communicated to you on June 29, the New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) released state guidelines for reopening schools on June 26. These guidelines provided several mandates – many suggestions – and is permitting districts the ability to develop their own plans that work best for each district. Nonetheless, there are three minimum guidelines that must be followed:

- Schools in New Jersey will reopen for in-person instruction for the fall.
- Students will be required to wear face coverings when social distancing of six feet cannot be maintained, unless prohibited from doing so because of a medical condition.
- All faculty and staff must wear a face mask unless prohibited from doing so because of a medical condition.

Furthermore, the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) advocates that students be physically present in school for the coming school year. The AAP is an organization that we have followed on issues affecting students and school districts, and our school nurses rely on them to help shape policy on critical matters. The AAP has issued these planning guidelines below for school reentry (full guidelines, click here):

- All policy considerations for the coming school year should start with a goal of having students physically present in school.
- Schools should consider a physical distancing standard of 3 feet for students with face coverings, which is the same standard set by the World Health Organization.
- The negative implications and consequences of not having students in school every day must be weighed against the current evidence of how COVID-19 affects school-aged children.
- The needs of students receiving special education programming demand the highest priority and must be weighed together with any virus mitigation measures.
As communicated earlier, we have assembled a district-wide reopening committee with many subcommittees that address scheduling, curriculum, special education, cleaning protocols, social distancing, PPE, technology, etc., and we continue to meet weekly. We have included parents, parent-teacher organizations, teachers and the district’s union representative during the planning stages. Planning efforts have included measuring every classroom -- with administration and building administrators walking every classroom and building -- to determine the maximum number of students permitted in each room while maintaining the six-foot social distancing requirement mandated by the NJDOE.

We are currently preparing the district’s reopening plan that meets all state-mandated requirements. The plan will be submitted to Fair Lawn Board of Education for approval and then NJDOE for their review, no later than four weeks prior to school commencing. Please note that the district’s survey results helped us immensely in preparing for the fall. Below is our tentative road map regarding our reopening plan for students and is not finalized, however it is our goal to communicate with you as early as possible for planning purposes:

**Grade K-6**

We are able to make accommodations in classrooms and schedules to safely have K-6 students in school daily.

- Due to the reconfiguration of our middle schools and 5th grade entering the new middle school model, this leaves all elementary schools with additional space. It is our intention to utilize this additional space, plus areas such as art rooms and media centers if necessary to safely space our students out with 6 feet between each student. In analyzing our enrollment numbers, we are exploring a K-6 model where students will attend school five days a week for a full day.
- Our final plan will include direction on minimizing student movement throughout the day, room utilization, staffing assignments, and changes to the lunch schedule to allow for proper social distancing.

**Grade 7-12**

Due to enrollment, building and classroom size, and the daily academic schedule, students in grades 7-12 will follow a hybrid schedule of onsite and distance learning. These grades will follow a half-day schedule - one morning group and one afternoon group - and students will be placed into two cohorts: A and B. We will make every attempt to arrange the cohorts by alphabet to keep siblings together across the district. Both cohorts will meet every day, five days a week; the number of weeks these cohort groups will meet in either the morning or afternoon block will be determined later and may be switched every month.

In between the morning and afternoon sessions, the school will be properly sanitized.

We acknowledge that the proposed schedule for grades 7-12 will present difficulties for some families, but know that it is required for student and staff safety. A 50 percent reduction of students will allow for proper social distancing. The elimination of lunch is essential due to inadequate space in the cafeterias, an open lunch period at the high school, and the inability to have lunch in the classroom at these grade levels.
Special Education

Students in self-contained special education classes will attend school for a full day normal bell schedule, five days a week.

Distance Learning Committee

In addition to the above mentioned models, we have established a Distance Learning Committee. This committee will plan and prepare for students who opt out of school, our 7-12 proposed hybrid model, as well as the possibility that schools should close again.

Next Steps For You At Home

To prepare for the coming year, there are a few steps you can take now. We ask that you make arrangements to help us bring students to school every day with safeguards and virus mitigation strategies in place.

- 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.
- 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 have hand sanitizers in every room, but it would be good if students had their own as well.

While this is a lot to digest, please note that these preliminary plans and subject to change, unfortunately.

As a parent of a child entering Kindergarten, this is the last way I ever envisioned my daughter beginning such a pivotal time in her life and my hope is that there will be a light at the end of the tunnel and ‘normalcy’ will return for all of us. We also know that depending on data, we may have to dial back again and we will be ready, should we need to have that conversation.

Lastly, thank you for your patience and support as we unveil our plans for the fall. We will address many other issues and considerations with respect to PPE, transportation, health screenings, school routines, bell schedules, instruction and assessments, curricular resources, extracurricular activities, before and after care, technology support, and more. We fully understand some of the hardships involved in anything less than a 100 percent return to school. We will provide additional information as it becomes available in the coming weeks.

Sincerely,

Nicholas J. Norcia, Superintendent of Schools