

The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Public Schools

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Opening Statement Dr. Mast, Superintendent Scotch Plains-Fanwood Board of Education Meeting February 18, 2021

Good Evening All. I am happy that you are able to join our board meeting tonight.

- I want to start by saying that the BOE and **I know the challenges and anxiety in our community.**
- One of the most challenging things as a parent is when you do not have control over the choices for your children...navigating the pandemic, the hybrid schedules and virtual classes hits exactly into that frustrating and stressful place. So we do understand the strong emotion and feedback we have received.
- We want YOU to know that the BOE, the district staff and I have the same goal of having our children back in school. Last week, I was happy to share that **we are working to solve challenges for elementary students to be in school 5 days, single session in the spring with continuation of the 100% virtual option for parents who want that choice.** That begins **March 15th** for PreK through grade 4.
- There are some challenges in bringing more students back. Many of our classrooms are not large enough to support a full 6 foot distancing for all students as stated in CDC guidelines. Meals and spacing for lunch are problematic, amongst other things. We want you to know **how we are trying to overcome these barriers for SPF. Specifically,**
 - We have visited an elementary school in Cranford who has larger classrooms but implements 5 days of instruction with students spaced 6ft apart. Also we have incorporated a good practice on providing transparency through communications regarding positive cases in schools and the district. This informs everyone about the cases in our school community and helps us work together to keep our schools open. *(I want to emphasize that although we continue to identify positive cases we do not have confirmed student-to-student, student-to-staff, staff-to-student, or teacher-to-teacher transmission. This gives us evidence that our mitigation strategies are effective).*
 - We toured an elementary school in Berkeley Heights that has similar sized classrooms to ours and saw that they have students less than 6ft apart. They are utilizing the individual plexiglass dividers. They have managed to do this successfully for six weeks without outbreaks in the school. This provides a local positive example and helpful data for our 5 day a week implementation.
 - In middle and high school the extra challenge is that students change classes complicating potential contact tracing efforts and increasing exposure to more

individuals. In order to give more students additional time in the building we are now putting in alternating Wednesdays beginning **March 3rd**. This will allow us to monitor transmission rates as we build to full student return.

- We are taking incremental steps to bring more students back. I will let you know the next step by **March 30th**.
- Air and circulation are critical for safety and we will benefit from the investment we made in into our ventilation systems and the spring season where it's warmer and we can allow more fresh air through open windows.
- **We have heard that private schools are requiring parents to make commitments for next year now so We want to be clear tonight that we are working on a plan to have students back in school full time in September. It is our intention to be Fully Opened in September of 2021.** Based on what we know now, it will come with the same safety measures at minimum, like health checks, masks and social distancing.
- We all know that we cannot predict the pandemic, the virus and all of the outcomes. However, we will have a plan for the major scenarios that can be anticipated. **We are working through all of the current information so that we can have a detailed plan for 5 days, full time school in September.** We anticipate we will have that plan by {May 15th} which allows us time to incorporate any learnings from the 5 single session day schedule implementation. We are brainstorming ways that we will be able to accommodate lunch.
- This unprecedented situation has created extraordinary pressure in our community. Parents, Teachers, Administrators are all navigating the hardest scenarios and it has polarized our community. We believe the next step in bringing our community back together is by having kids in school and continuing to move towards “normal”. We truly have a tremendous school system and it is the students, educators, staff, parents, PTAs that create something special for Scotch Plains and Fanwood. We are working together to do everything we can to get back to the positive school community that we all love and value. Thank you all for your continued support and partnership.