

The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Public Schools

512 Cedar Street
Scotch Plains, New Jersey 07076

Dr. Joan Mast, Ed.D.
Superintendent of Schools

908-232-6161
Ext. 4001 or 4002

August 14, 2020

Dear SPF Community,

For the last six months, we have all navigated the ever changing landscape that the coronavirus pandemic continues to create. Throughout, the health and safety of our students and staff have been our top priority. As we face the start of a new school year, health and safety must remain at the forefront of our concerns.

Last night, school districts were sent additional guidance from the NJ Department of Health. After closely reviewing the details regarding the safe reopening of schools, we see that New Jersey is still in the moderate zone for the spread of the Coronavirus disease. With this level of Covid-19 still in our communities, we must know with complete confidence that our buildings meet the highest safety levels. The guidelines provide clarity in regards to the important role that ventilation systems play in containing the spread of the virus. The overall district ventilation system is an area of concern which needs and requires professional assessment and targeted remediation. Our current HVAC systems are unable to accept MERV 13 filters, thus requiring alternatives to provide additional air filtering.

While it is my understanding that our ventilation systems are adequate and appropriate for a typical school year, this clearly is not a typical school year. At this time, we do not feel that all the buildings are ventilated to the level required to contain the spread of Covid-19. As soon as we are reasonably able to determine the timeframe required to remedy the situation, I will provide updates about this work to both the public and the NJ Department of Education.

Based on the new guidance provided by the NJ Department of Health, and in an abundance of caution, our district is updating our Restart Plan to reflect All Virtual Learning as our first option. Once approved by the County Superintendent, our district will start school in September using the At Home Virtual learning model. By doing so, we are prioritizing the health and safety of our students, teachers and entire staff. The Spring of 2020 taught us many lessons in regards to At Home Learning. This decision will allow us to put all of our energy into creating the best pedagogical model for delivering online instruction for the start of school.

Many of you attended the SPF Restart Plan Parent Information Sessions this week. Although the focus was on the implementation of the hybrid model, much of the information applies to the fully virtual model as well. The structure of your child's classes will follow a set schedule and will be the same that we described in these sessions. The structure will include real-time interaction between students and teachers. Information for our students that receive Special Services will be forthcoming.

We will be delaying the start of the school year for students until September 14. This will give our Administration and Staff Members (4) days at the beginning of September for additional Professional Development, and will help us to ensure that all students are equitably equipped with the technology they need to participate in the enhanced model of virtual instruction that we will provide. The virtual plan will

include stimulating and rigorous lessons in a variety of formats for increased student engagement. With the addition of counselors and Social Emotional Learning professional development, attention will be given to building teacher to student, and student to class group connections as we focus to safeguard students' social and emotional wellbeing.

This is a deeply emotional time for everyone, and we realize that some families, such as those who have already chosen an all-remote option, will welcome this change while others will not. We understand that there will be childcare and work challenges for families. We will continue to work with the FSP YMCA and the JCC to build a strong support system for our students and their families.

I am confident that together, we will continue to successfully educate our children in the months ahead. We must protect the future by standing united as a community of parents, students, teachers, administrators and Board of Education members. This pandemic will eventually end and what will matter most, is that we move forward through this time united in protecting our community. As ever, our Scotch Plains-Fanwood teachers, staff and Board of Education are committed to working on behalf of you and your families to create a bright future for all our children.

We will be holding virtual information sessions the week of August 24 with Dr. Mast and Administration to listen to your questions and concerns. Details will follow.

In the interim you may submit questions to: reopening-spf@spfk12.org.

Sincerely,

Dr. Joan Mast
Superintendent of Scotch Plains-Fanwood Schools