

Berkeley Heights Public Schools
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Include, Inspire, Empower

Dear Families;

The start of the school year is just around the corner. This coming week we welcome our new teachers to the district, followed by the rest of the staff on September 1st, and finally the students on September 3rd. The return to school is always an exciting time. We all remember what it felt like to be students anticipating the new school year. What you may not realize is that those butterflies never fade. Teachers, administrators, and even Superintendents feel like the sprinter on the blocks, coiled and ready to explode into action.

Unfortunately, the start of this year, like the end of the last, will be unprecedented. At a time when usually everything is settled and in place the district is still dealing with a great deal of uncertainty about the reopening of schools. If you have been reading my updates over the summer you are aware that school districts across the state have been adjusting to a series of changing directives concerning the reopening of schools. Recently, Governor Murphy, citing local control, issued an Executive Order authorizing individual school districts to open remotely if they did not meet health and safety standards outlined over the course of the summer in other executive orders and directives from the NJDOE.

I am pleased to tell you that Berkeley Heights Public Schools Plan B has been certified as meeting the health and safety standards for reopening for in-person instruction by both the Department of Education and Department of Health. However, since Governor Murphy's latest change to the reopening criteria, many districts in the state have opted to start the school year in an all remote learning format.

As a consequence of this new executive order many of our teaching staff who live in those districts and who have young children of their own are faced with significant child care issues. These staff members, under the Family First Coronavirus Response Act, are entitled to up to 12

weeks of leave. The district has received 21 requests for this type of leave. Additionally, we have had 5 medical leave requests. These are leaves where teachers are absent due to pregnancy or other illnesses. I fully expect that more FFCRA leave requests will be forthcoming. Please note, teachers who have submitted for this type of leave of absence may rescind their request for leave if the district goes remote.

More specifically at Governor Livingston we have received a total of 17 leave requests and subsequently have not been able to hire replacement/substitute teachers. Due to the amount of teachers who will be unavailable/unable to teach in-person in September, we have **no choice but to start Governor Livingston in an all virtual capacity**. We will re-evaluate on a monthly basis. While our buildings were deemed safe, and our plan was approved, we need teachers to be in our buildings to operate under our Plan B approach. The lack of available in-person teaching resources is the sole reason for the change in approach at Governor Livingston.

However, students will attend one day in-person at GL prior to moving to the all remote plan. On September 3rd, we welcome Group A students to GL to meet their teachers and obtain their materials. On September 4th, we welcome Group B students to GL to meet their teachers and obtain their materials. The all remote option will commence on Tuesday, September 8th. Given this change to an all remote option, Governor Livingston will operate on its regular six period rotate and drop schedule for the full day, not the one previously communicated under Plan B. Mr. Nixon will send a detailed letter out later today. Mrs. Gardner will also communicate plans for students from her department.

As more districts choose to start the year remote, I anticipate the number of FFCRA leave requests will increase in the K-8 grades as well. These new requests come on top of earlier requests from teachers who asked for health related leaves and may affect the reopening plans for our other grades.

Berkeley Heights is not alone in facing this challenge. Across the state there is a teacher shortage caused by retirements, health leaves, and now family leaves. As the state of New Jersey has rigorous certification requirements, even the loss of one teacher with a specialized certificate can be devastating to our programs. Should our district continue to receive additional leave requests it could have a significant impact on our ability to reopen our other schools under Plan B.

Our teachers, like everyone else, want everything to return to normal, they want to be in-school doing what they do best, and doing what they love to do: teaching your children. But, I also understand that some of them have very real health issues that prevent their return, and some of them have their own children that they need to take care of.

We have every intention of opening school in-person under Plan B for grades PreK - 8. However, while the buildings are deemed safe, as stated previously we are also constrained by the realities of staffing the buildings and providing the educational programs our students need.

Unfortunately, we are in a situation where all of the options are sub-optimal. We understand, and take very seriously, that any and every decision that we make impacts someone in a negative way. We are striving to arrive at a place where the pluses outweigh the minuses for the district as a whole and where we meet the needs of all stakeholders, but particularly the educational and emotional well-being of our students. All options are on the table and being considered, including an all remote learning option at some grades, while having other grades in-person/hybrid model. We thank you for your continued patience, understanding, and support.

Health and Safety Update

HVAC and Ventilation:

Over the summer, our Business Administrator, Donna Felezzola has been working with multiple agencies and our maintenance crews to ensure our ventilation systems are up to code and can provide the air movement that is critical to minimizing the spread of the virus. This is in addition to making sure all student classes are held in classrooms with windows. (For example, The CMS cafeteria is closed to students) The DOE and the DOH have approved BHPS to move forward with our current ventilation system.

Please see our submission to the DOE and the DOH [here](#). This follows the DOE checklist that they provided.

Temperature Checks:

As a parent, you will need to check your child's temperature and submit a health questionnaire using PowerSchool every morning. More information regarding that procedure will be shared on August 28th .

DOH Guidance and Protocols:

The Department of Health released more protocols last week. You can find those [here](#). They have also adopted a [new classification system](#) and that will guide our responses to cases in the community and/or schools.

PPE:

Our PPE has arrived!

Social Distancing:

With the adoption of Plan B the district can space students 6 feet apart in most classrooms. In those that we cannot, we will be using other classrooms/spacing mechanisms to have our students as far apart as possible.

Additional Resources:

We are in the process of designing a webpage that has all of our COVID resources in one place. It will be coming soon, as our tech crew is focused on reopening.

Demo Lesson:

For our 6-12 classrooms, we conducted a “demo” lesson yesterday. We will be working on an elementary lesson this week. You can see our demo [here](#). Many thanks to Mr. Finley and Mr. Skara for working to get this together.

FAQ:

Please see our updated FAQs [here](#).

Subs Needed:

With the number of staff out, the District is in desperate need of substitute teachers. If you or someone you know is interested in becoming a substitute teacher, we are taking applications. You can apply [here](#).

Sincerely,

Dr. Melissa Varley