

Dear Families;

I hope that this letter finds you well and that you and your families have been able to find time to enjoy summer break. As promised, I am writing to provide you with more information about the opening of school and to ask you to provide further feedback to help us in our planning process. As I shared in my last email, the State of NJ's guiding plan for the reopening of schools requires students to return to in-school learning in some way this Fall. In addition, all guidance we have received emphasizes the critical importance of having students physically in-school as much as safely possible. However, Governor Murphy announced this past Friday that families could have greater flexibility in terms of having their children physically present in-school to start the year. Please [complete this survey](#) after reading the information in this letter so that we will be able to consider that input and plan appropriately. Please complete the survey by 9 P.M. Friday, July 24th.

Since my last letter, the district administration, working with the board of education and the education association, has developed three plans for the reopening of school. These plans drew upon the state of New Jersey's comprehensive reopening document and incorporated guidance from the [American Academy of Pediatrics](#), the [World Health Organization](#), the [National Academies of Science, Engineering, and Medicine](#), and the [CDC](#), with a goal of maintaining a high level of meaningful instruction and academic rigor. The three plans are explained in greater detail below, but very simply: Plan A has all students in-building for half a day and remote learning for a portion of the afternoon; Plan B would be structured the same as Plan A, but only allow approximately 50% of students in building any given day; Plan C would be fully remote. Please understand that the District, Board of Education, and the Department of Health will select either Plan A or Plan B for implementation. Parents will have the option to choose Plan C for their student regardless of that decision.

In the 14 days since I last emailed you, we have seen how quickly the situation can change as we watch the massive increase in cases across the country and the resurgence of cases in some states that were thought to have begun recovery. The Ivy and Patriot Leagues have canceled the Fall athletic schedule and other major cities and states have announced hybrid (our Plan B) and full remote (our Plan C) instruction. The start of school is only seven weeks away! **Berkeley Heights Public Schools will be ready to implement any of the plans that we have developed depending on the conditions we might face.**

We are fortunate that over the past six weeks Berkeley Heights and Mountainside continue to report very few cases of Covid-19 and the State of New Jersey currently has one of the lowest positivity rates in the country. Although the data shows that Covid-19 has a less serious impact on children, there are critical concerns for the health and safety of the staff. Each of our plans contain layered interventions that greatly reduce risk of transmission.

Finally, although we have worked closely with the local department of health and are within the state guidelines with our proposed plans, the NJ Department of Education has yet to establish

the steps for the final approval process and implementation. As such all of the information below is preliminary and subject to change.

Plan A

- All students will report to school each day. Students will receive 4 hours of in-person instruction. There will be no lunch served at school. All schools will have an early dismissal.
- All students and staff will be required to wear face coverings (e.g. masks), unless they have a medically documented respiratory or other condition. In that case, they will be required to wear a face shield.
- Students will be spaced 3-6 feet apart from one another.
- A space of between 6-10 feet will be created in the front of the room to space staff from students as much as possible.
- In grades 1-5, Core Subjects will be prioritized over other areas in terms of in-person instruction.
- In grades 6-12, the schedule will likely entail a four-period day to reduce the frequency of transition time in the hallways. More details are coming soon.
- Transition time will increase and students will be dismissed/transitioned through hallways based on wing of building and/or grade level. Plans will be developed at each building.
- Teachers will utilize some form of live instruction and/or video software during class to enable students who are at home to participate during the lesson.
- We will work with Primrose, Westminster Preschool/K, and the YMCA regarding childcare for those parents who will need it.

Information specific to Mary Kay McMillan Early Childhood Center:

- Grade 1
 - 4 hour schedule every day
- Full Day Kindergarten (1 Section)
 - 4 hour schedule every day (there will be a partial refund)
- ½ Day Kindergarten
 - 4 hour schedule with the two groups alternating every three days (A, B,C & D, E, F) to allow for fewer transitions and enhanced classroom cleaning and disinfecting between groups
- Pre-K program (a 3.5 hour day 4 days per week)
 - Program will be offered 4 days per week
 - AM Pre-K will meet 3.5 hours/day on Monday and Tuesday
 - PM Pre-K will meet 3.5 hours/day on Wednesday and Thursday

- This schedule allows for a better educational block of time with less transportation and enhanced classroom cleaning and disinfecting between groups

Plan B

- All of Plan A remains in effect, with the following key changes:
- Approximately 50% of students will be in attendance on a given day.
 - We will alternate weeks with half the student population present at a time. One week your child would be in school for five days for a 4 hour schedule, the next week they would be learning remotely.
 - The student body will be split in half according to the first letter of their last name so that siblings throughout the district remain on the same schedule.
- Students will be spaced 3-6 feet apart from one another; with roughly 50% of students in attendance, the distance in most classrooms will approach about 6 feet.
- Please be aware that Plan B significantly impacts the amount of direct instruction and time available for the completion of district curricula.

Plan C

- Students will receive full virtual instruction.
- Each school will have a set schedule and teachers and students will follow that schedule, with live interaction taking place each day.
- Please be aware that Plan C significantly impacts the amount of direct instruction and time available for the completion of district curricula.
- There may be individual or special circumstances in which some students may report to school, depending on needs. If the Governor issues another Executive Order calling for complete remote learning, this will change.

A short (and not exhaustive) list of steps being taken to increase student and staff safety:

- All classrooms will operate with windows open, and we will be encouraging teachers to bring classes outdoors as much as possible. We are also looking at several other avenues to increase ventilation and air flow in the instructional spaces. This will mean that students and staff will not be working in the comfort of climate controlled classrooms.
- All classrooms in the district will be outfitted with hand sanitizer and wipes when the year begins.
- At the pre-K-5 level, students will largely remain in their own classrooms throughout the day and they will not mix with other classes of students.

- Schools will be disinfected thoroughly each day. This is one of the reasons for the early dismissal schedule, but it will not be possible to sanitize every space and item after every use throughout the day.
- At all levels, we will attempt to reduce the sharing of common objects. However, if schools are in session under Plan A or Plan B, it will not be realistic to think that every item a student might touch (door handle, desk, chair, faucet, books or writing implements etc.) will be disinfected after every use.
- If students are in school they will touch common items. For this reason, it is critical that students practice good hand hygiene. We ask that you please purchase personal hand sanitizer (alcohol-based) for your child and start to reinforce good hand hygiene with them now.
- Weather permitting, our younger students will have some form of “recess”. This will be a mask break for them. We are not exactly sure how this will look at this time. We will have hand sanitizing stations at the entrance to the buildings for students to sanitize their hands upon exit and entry.

Contact Tracing:

We have received numerous questions about contact tracing. I have been advised by the Department of Education that contact tracing decisions will be made by the Department of Health and that we must remain in close contact with the public health officers if we have a case of Covid-19. A public health officer informed me that a “close contact” is someone who has spent more than ten minutes of time within 6 feet of a person who tests positive. We continue to work closely with our public health officials as our schools reopen and we will follow their direction.

How can I prepare my child for what is coming?

As I mentioned in my earlier letter, helping your child gain mask ‘endurance’ and ‘discipline’ over long periods of time before returning to school will be critical to their comfort and success. Personally, I have recently had cause to be in a face covering for over three hours a day over several days. It took me time to get used to it.

On behalf of our school nurses, please consider getting your child the seasonal flu shot before the school year begins. Covid-19 is challenging enough. If we can try to reduce other forms of illness it will be very helpful. A flu shot is required for our pre-K students. For those who are parents of older students, we ask that you consider it.

If you are planning to travel to a state with high rates of transmission as identified by the state of New Jersey, please understand that your child will have to quarantine for 14 days and will not be able to report to school if your travel occurred within the two weeks of school beginning.

As you might imagine, this pandemic has been all consuming. As are you, I am reading all of the articles, op-eds, digital media posts from teachers and parents, as well as the news to gain

as much insight into what we are facing as I can. There are no easy or quick solutions to the challenges we face. Please know that I read every email that I receive from parents, but that recently I have been unable to respond to each of them because of volume and the demands to create multiple viable plans to open in the Fall. I appreciate your messages, even if I am not as responsive as I normally am, or would like to be.

It is entirely possible that over the course of the year we will have to implement all of the plans that we are developing. However, I am sure that you will agree with me when I say that every day that we are able to conduct in-person, in-building instruction for all students is critical. I am looking to maximize this as much as possible. The only way to successfully navigate the Covid-19 pandemic is together. We must rely on each other to make good decisions and work to protect each other in this trying time. I will continue to keep you informed as our plans develop, as we respond to the conditions in the community, and the feedback we receive from the Departments of Health and Education.

Reminder that the Board of Education will hold a meeting on July 30th at 7:30 via Zoom. More information regarding the meeting will be posted soon.

I wish you well. Have a safe and enjoyable rest of summer.

Reminder that the [survey](#) is due by Friday, July 24th at 9 PM.

Sincerely,

Dr. Melissa Varley