

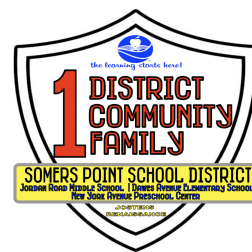
SOMERS POINT SCHOOL DISTRICT

ADMINISTRATION OFFICES

121 West New York Avenue
Somers Point, New Jersey 08244

Phone: (609) 927-2053 ~ Fax: (609) 927-7351 ~

www.sptsd.org



Michelle CarneyRay-Yoder, Ed.D., Superintendent Ext: 3211
Michele Roemer, Ed.D., Interim Business Administrator/ Board Secretary Ext: 3220

August 21, 2020

Dear Somers Point Families,

Since the State of New Jersey issued the *Road Back to School* Guidance on June, 26, 2020, a committee of over thirty stakeholders invested tireless hours to ensure that Somers Point School District would be prepared to safely open according to the requirements of that document. I believe the plan developed by the committee would have allowed for us to open safely and according to requirements by the State.

While our plan met or exceeded the guidelines, the State continues to provide additional, often conflicting, guidance and information on a daily basis, requiring frequent revisions to the plan. An example of these changes occurred on August 3, 2020, where the New Jersey Department of Education released a checklist for reopening of schools that outlined areas that had to be reviewed and implemented based upon State of New Jersey expectations. We revisited our plan and did everything in our power to address all the components required for a hybrid opening. Then, On August 13, 2020 the Governor released Executive Order 175 (EO 175) and the New Jersey Department of Health (NJDOH) released guidelines for local health departments, which were conflicting in nature in the areas of social distancing, contact tracing, ventilation, face coverings, and physical spacing in classrooms.

In conjunction with this ever-changing and conflicting guidance the *Leaders for Educational Excellence (LEE)*, including *NJEA, NJPSA, NJSBA, PTA, and NJASA*, which advocate for the students and staff of all New Jersey school districts shared a joint statement noting too many unanswered questions by the State of New Jersey guidance and a lack of funding for mandates to keep our schools safe would put educational communities at risk regarding this highly contagious virus. These groups advocated for an all-remote start allowing for time to ensure all additional health and safety protocols could be met.

The most recent guidance from the Atlantic County Department of Health, for all students and staff state:

- All members of a classroom community must be at least 6 feet apart or more at all times.
- Masks cannot be a substitute for social distance. This requirement includes all areas of a student's school day, including buses.

In addition to these challenges Somers Point is challenged by:

- Missing 30% of census data from our families and staff regarding their learning environment choice
- A concern for staffing in-person instruction
- Long delays in shipping of devices for 1:1 learning environment

As we approach the two weeks leading up to our new school year, these challenges make it difficult to finalize and complete hybrid plans. A decision needed to be made so our families had time to prepare for the upcoming school year. While we are confident our buildings are safe, we need to err on the side of caution for the best interest of your children and our staff.

For these reasons we need to delay the implementation of the Hybrid plan prepared by the Somers Point School District. We will be opening on September 8th, in the following manner:

- **Jordan Road** will be completely remote until October 23, 2020.
- **Dawes Avenue Elementary and New York Avenue Preschool Center** will open in a hybrid model until we are able to ensure every Pre-K to Third Grade student is one-to-one with a device, and then all elementary-aged students will be completely remote until October 23, 2020. The projected date of the fully-remote plan at the elementary level is on or around the last week of September.

We do understand that the opening options above are not ideal and we empathize with our families. We had every hope of being able to return to in-person instruction in some form. We also understand that during the spring there were many concerns about the delivery of remote instruction during the start of the pandemic. These concerns will be addressed with significantly more direct instruction via video conferencing; one platform for students to access their instructional materials, and more communication with teaching staff on a daily basis.

Further information regarding students participating in the hybrid model at the elementary levels along with schedules, supply lists, YMCA Child Care, and additional information will be shared by your child's building principal early in the upcoming week. All of this information will be distributed in the OnCourse Parent Portal, Social Media, and the District website. If you have additional questions or need help with the OnCourse Parent Portal, please feel free to contact your building principal directly.

Please know that we are continually evaluating the current Pandemic landscape and will do everything in our power to welcome your children back to our schools as quickly as possible. We value all of our students and their families. The health and safety of our school family is our main priority.

Educationally Yours,



Michelle Carney-Ray-Yoder, Ed.D., *Superintendent*