



MULLICA TOWNSHIP SCHOOL DISTRICT

Mr. Andrew Weber
Superintendent of Schools

July 27, 2020

Dear Parents,

I hope you are safe and well! I am writing to update you on our reopening plans for September. Our Restart Committee is hard at work formulating a detailed framework for the school year. We are incorporating guidance from the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) and the CDC, both trusted resources we often look to during decision making for health related matters.

Our plan is not final. Every day we see that the COVID-19 situation, both locally and nationally, is continually developing and these conditions may impact our plans. Currently New Jersey is in stage 2 of the Road to Recovery. Our plans are based upon current executive orders and guidelines from the NJDOE and Governor Murphy and could change with new guidance and/or executive orders. I am sharing with you what we know today and what you may want to consider as you plan for September.

GUIDANCE RECEIVED

The NJ DOE Guidance (The Road Back: Restart and Recovery Plan for Education) is over 100 pages. The guidance states that absent a shift in public health data, school buildings will open in some capacity for in-person instruction and operations in the fall. The guidance leaves flexibility for interpretation on how schools are required to operate when they open.

Shortly after the DOE guidance was released, the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) delivered their guidance for reopening schools. This organization, albeit apart from the DOE, provides valuable perspectives that shape many educators' practices. The AAP highlights the importance of having children attend school, and reminds us that the negative implications and consequences of not having students in school every day must be weighed against the current evidence about how COVID-19 affects school-aged children.

REOPENING WORK

In light of the guidance received, and with knowledge of our district, its value and its commitments, Mullica Township School District (MTSD) has brought the task at hand into sharper focus. The MTSD is using the following guiding principles for development of a comprehensive plan:

- We will make the overall health and safety of the students, staff, and community a priority. This includes physical, mental, and social-emotional health and well-being.
- We will strive to maximize learning. Student achievement is always an important factor.

Home of the Coyotes

P. O. BOX 318 • 500 ELWOOD ROAD • ELWOOD, NJ • 08217
PHONE 609-561-3868 • FAX 609-561-7133 • MULLICASCHOOLS.COM

This institution is an equal opportunity provider



MULLICA TOWNSHIP SCHOOL DISTRICT

Mr. Andrew Weber
Superintendent of Schools

- We will do our best to ensure equitable access for all students, while respecting families that are concerned and/or high risk.
- We will communicate in an ongoing and transparent manner.

WHAT WE KNOW

- The health and safety of our students and staff is our first priority
- We are required to develop a reopening plan that includes some form of in-person instruction. We are developing such a plan while accounting for families who are not comfortable sending their children back to school at this time.
- We know some of our families want in-person instruction five days per week while others do not want their children to return to school at all. The sentiment surrounding reopening school is as diverse as our great community. There is no single plan that will make everyone happy. We are also aware that guidance from the medical community (CDC vs. AAP vs. WHO) is not always in agreement and has changed as more COVID-19 details emerge.
- From the AAP, “No single action or set of actions will completely eliminate the risk associated with the virus that causes COVID-19, but implementation of several coordinated interventions can greatly reduce that risk.”
- Just as there are risks associated with sending students back to school buildings in September, there are risks with maintaining a 100% remote learning environment for all students. Students rely on schools for academic and social/emotional development, food security, physical activity, and safety.
- Our schools in September 2020 will look nothing like September 2019.
- Over 60% of parents responding to our Reopening Schools Survey indicated they would prefer a hybrid model of instruction.

WHAT WE ARE PLANNING

With the guiding principles in mind, our current plan is to offer a hybrid model of instruction. The hybrid model will consist of two days of in-person learning and three days of virtual learning. As per Governor Murphy’s July 24th announcement, parents have the right to choose an all virtual model. There will be an improved virtual instruction program offered as an option for all families who have concerns about sending their children in person. As such, we ask you complete a brief [Return to Learn](#) survey to assist us in finalizing our reopening plans.

Our plans are being made based on what we believe is best for our educational community. The details and considerations below represent the foundation that we are building from, however all plans will be subject to additional input and approvals from the local Departments of Health and the Department of Education.



MULLICA TOWNSHIP SCHOOL DISTRICT

Mr. Andrew Weber
Superintendent of Schools

In-person instruction:

Confirmed in-person details to date:

- Students and staff will be required to wear face coverings, with accommodations made for those who cannot for certain medical or other conditions that preclude the use of face coverings.
- We will strive to create as much physical distancing as possible in classrooms, hallways, and other spaces to cut down on the amount of “mask time”.
- We will add measures and additional time during the day to allow for handwashing, mask "breaks," snack, etc. Teachers will be encouraged to utilize outdoor learning spaces.
- Elementary students will receive 3-4 breaks each day, while middle school students will receive a minimum of 2 breaks each day.
- Policies for daily screenings, handling of symptoms, and contact tracing will be developed and communicated as the summer progresses.

Other in-person considerations:

- We are planning to follow an abbreviated daily schedule (8:30am-12:45pm). Factors that impact the length of the in-person day that are currently being thought through include how (if at all) to serve lunch, how to offer teachers time to devote to certain aspects of virtual instruction, and how to ensure that our custodial staff has ample time to sanitize the schools on a daily basis.
- We are planning to provide some form of recess and/or playground time. Exact procedures for play time will be developed and communicated as appropriate.

Remote instruction:

We have received feedback from students, parents, and staff on ways to improve on our spring remote instruction. The administration and subcommittees are currently working on increasing the rigor, expectations, and consistency of our remote instruction. Details will follow once these plans are fully developed.

UPDATES

In my June 29th parent update, all parents were afforded the opportunity to participate in the District Restart Committee. In the July 8th update, all parents were asked to complete a reopening survey. The results of that survey have been used in the development of our plans.

District Restart Committees: As referenced earlier in this letter, committees are comprised of administration, teachers, parents, and board of education members.



MULLICA TOWNSHIP SCHOOL DISTRICT

Mr. Andrew Weber
Superintendent of Schools

School-Based Pandemic Response Teams: The school-based pandemic response teams are already established via our existing School Safety/Crisis Teams and are responsible for overseeing the implementation of the reopening plans.

NEXT STEPS AND FAMILY PREPARATION:

- Start building "mask endurance" in your child(ren). Please find reusable/washable face coverings that your child is comfortable wearing and gradually build up the amount of time they can tolerate wearing them. Masks are an important component of our health, safety, and risk mitigation plans.
- Have a working thermometer in your home, personal supplies of hand sanitizer (alcohol-based) that your child can carry to school, and any other personal items that you think will help your children feel comfortable back in a school environment.

It is important for everyone to understand that much of our work still lies in front of us. This message is intended to give you current information and a sense of direction with our plans. At this time we intend to release our reopening plans following the August 5th Board of Education meeting.

Be Safe and Be Well,

Andrew Weber
Superintendent of Schools