



Mountainside School District

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Janet Walling - Superintendent of Schools

July 7, 2020

Mountainside Families,

I hope that you are enjoying your summer and finding time to relax and recharge. I would like to update you on the process that we are using to develop reopening plans for Mountainside Schools in September.

Last week we received guidance from the New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) on the reopening of schools. This document entitled, [The Road Back](#), provides all school districts with information to guide decisions, which are in the best interests of the school community, with minimum standards to ensure the health and safety of our students and staff. In addition to a variety of areas to be addressed, there are some required aspects that factor directly into any reopening structure that we implement. These include the following:

- It is the expectation of the NJDOE that, absent a shift in the public health data, all schools will reopen in some capacity for in-person instruction in September.
- We are to practice social distancing within the classrooms and buildings (6 feet of separation) to the greatest extent possible.
- Face coverings are required for all students whenever social distancing is not possible (unless a student is prohibited from doing so because of a medical condition).
- Staff and visitors (over the age of 2) will be required to wear face coverings at all times (unless prohibited from doing so because of a medical condition).

All school districts are facing their own unique challenges, leaving no single blueprint from which to develop a reopening plan. Your input is very important and we need your feedback to understand community priorities and what scenario(s) you may be most comfortable with under the current public health conditions. Therefore, we are requesting that you complete this [Reopening of Schools Survey](#) as soon as possible (last date for submission: July 10th).

Please Note: This survey includes similar questions to the one sent out previously on June 15th, however, we do ask that you re-submit your responses using this updated survey as it includes various questions which are more targeted to the newest guidance that we have received.

I have spent extensive time digesting and examining the 104 pages of documentation from the NJDOE, meeting with other superintendents and health officials, discussing options with the administrators, and measuring every available classroom space in both buildings in an effort to determine several possible options for the students of Mountainside. Each option has various pros and cons, along with limitations, so I would like to provide you with a broad outline of each so that you are aware of their different aspects when responding to the questions on the survey. *Please be aware that **NO** specific option has been chosen yet and any option that we plan to use will still need to receive approval from the County Department of Education along with the local health department.*

- 5-Day Live Option - All students return to school 5 days per week on a shortened day schedule (4-4.5 hours) with additional activities to be completed at home in the afternoon. Earlier dismissal times will allow for staff/student acclimation to new safety and instructional protocols. Some basic guidelines that MUST be followed with this option include:
 - **Students and staff will be required** to wear face coverings throughout the day (unless medically unable to) as class enrollment sizes at all grade levels will not guarantee our ability to maintain social distancing in the classrooms and buildings.
 - A minimum of 3-6 feet of physical distancing will be followed throughout the building.
 - Lunch might not be served in this model -- to be determined

- Hybrid A/B Schedule - Students are divided into 2 cohorts (based on alphabetical order). Students would attend school for a full day on some days and participate in structured remote learning activities, provided by their teachers, on others. Some basic guidelines that MUST be followed with this option include:
 - **All staff must** wear face coverings unless medically unable to. Students must wear face coverings when physical distancing is not possible (ie, when not seated at desk and when moving around the classroom/halls, etc)
 - A minimum of 6 feet of physical distancing between desks will be followed in the classrooms. Because we will have decreased the number of students attending each day by half, this could allow students to remove face coverings when seated at their desks.
 - Lunches will not take place in large gatherings. Box lunches may be available for purchase.
 - Students would attend school using the following schedule:
 - A Day -- Monday, Wednesday, every other Friday
 - B Day - Tuesday, Thursday, every other Friday

Please utilize this information to help guide your response on the survey referenced above in order to help our Reopening Committees which will be made up of administrators, staff, Board of Education members, and other stakeholders, to determine the best structure for Mountainside's reopening. Your input will be very helpful as we navigate this new territory and create a reopening plan that addresses not only the health and safety of our students and staff, but also the social-emotional and academic needs of our students.

I know that there will be a variety of additional questions and thoughts that come up along the way as we prepare for the reopening of school, and we will do our best to address all of them as we develop our plans. Please rest assured that I will keep you informed throughout the summer and will share any adjustments as they occur. It is my goal to present the outline of our plan at the July 28th Board of Education meeting so that parents and staff have ample time to prepare for the beginning of the school year.

Thank you for your support and input!

Janet Walling