

WEST ESSEX REGIONAL SCHOOL DISTRICT

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Dear West Essex Community,

I hope this letter finds you and your families well. This is a follow-up to my July 20 correspondence regarding the reopening of schools. Our School Reopening Task Force, consisting of 65 community stakeholders, has been working tirelessly over the past several weeks, developing plans to maximize in-person instruction, while maintaining a safe and healthy environment for students, staff, and families.

In keeping with the New Jersey Department of Education's (NJDOE) recommendation that "school districts should strive to share their scheduling plans with staff, families, and students at least four weeks before the start of the school year in order to allow families to plan child care and work arrangements," [School District Reopening Plans](#) were presented to the Board of Education at a Special Meeting on Monday, July 27.

Our ultimate goal is for students to be in school as much as possible; however, ensuring the wellbeing of our school community remains our top priority. Therefore, our school district will be reopening through a phased approach with a hybrid model consisting of distance learning and in-person instruction at a reduced student capacity. The plan to reopen gradually was developed in consultation with educators, public health experts, healthcare providers, and other community stakeholders. Our cautious, vigilant, and systematic approach to opening up our schools offers many benefits. Beginning our school year with limits on attendance is a strategy that may lower the risk of transmission while maintaining healthy operations ([CDC Considerations for Events and Gatherings, 2020](#)). Phasing provides our staff the opportunity to get acclimated to revised operating procedures and adjust to new day-to-day tasks. In addition, phasing will allow certain subsets of students time to meet their teachers and transition to new buildings. We also need to be prepared to adjust to different instructional delivery models as circumstances, information, and guidelines change.

Phase 1 "Virtual Plus" with select cohorts and subsets of students will begin on September 2 and will last for a 6 day duration. All students will begin in-person instruction during Phase 2 with 33% of the student population in the buildings on a rotating basis. In addition, during Phase 2 for the month of October, all classes will meet virtually on Wednesdays. Phase 3 will extend the school day to a full day of instruction including lunch. Phase 4 is targeted to begin sometime during mid-November to early December with the goal of increasing student capacity to 50% in the buildings. The 100% occupancy goal of Phase 5 has no scheduled target date at this time. See the chart below for a summary of the West Essex Phased Reopening Plan (all dates are tentative):

<u>West Essex Phased Reopening Plan</u>				
Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3	Phase 4	Phase 5
Virtual Plus Single Session Select Cohorts and Subsets	33% Capacity Single Session 3 Cohorts	33% Capacity Full Day 3 Cohorts	50% Capacity Single Session or 50% Capacity Full Day 2 Cohorts	100% Capacity
Target Date: September 2 (6 day duration)	Target Date: September 14	Target Date: October	Target Date: mid November to early December	Target Date: TBD

The cohorts of students will be created by our Genesis Student Records System and will follow a schedule offering a combination of in-person instruction and virtual learning. The cohort plan allows for greater social distancing measures by minimizing the number of people physically present in the buildings each day.

On July 24, the [NJDOE](#) provided school districts with new guidance on full time remote learning options for families indicating that “school districts shall accommodate requests for full time remote learning. A family/guardian may request that some services be delivered entirely remotely, while other services follow the same schedule they otherwise would according to the district’s reopening plan.” ***Procedures for submitting requests for full time remote learning will be distributed by building principals in a separate correspondence.***

Our school district will continue to adhere to existing cleaning practices and procedures. Wipes and hand sanitizers will be available in all classrooms, and students will be expected to wipe down desks upon entering the classroom to supplement the cleaning, disinfecting, and sanitizing measures performed daily by the custodial staff.

Health screenings will occur safely and respectfully for students and staff upon arrival to school. This will include temperature checks and screenings for symptoms and history of exposure. We will require any student or employee exhibiting symptoms of illness to remain home from school. If the school district becomes aware that an individual who has spent time in a district facility tests positive for COVID-19, we will notify local health officials, families, and staff of a confirmed case while maintaining confidentiality.

All staff and students are required to wear face coverings at all times in our buildings and while using school district transportation unless doing so would inhibit the individual’s health. Wearing a mask is an additional step we can take to protect ourselves and others and a measure to help slow the spread of COVID-19. For more information on face coverings, please see the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\) Guidelines: Use of Masks to Help Slow the Spread of COVID-19](#). I also recommend the

following video from the CDC on how to wear a face covering: [Face Covering Tutorial](#).

In summary, our phased plan entails the following:

1. Schools will initially open to select students through a combination of in-person instruction and remote learning.
2. Our schools will open and follow a single session schedule with at 12:17 pm dismissal (no lunch will be served).
3. Parents may opt to have their children remain on [remote instruction](#) (more information to come directly from your child's principal).
4. Teachers will livestream instruction from the classroom, so the cohorts of students on virtual instruction may follow along from home.
5. Special Education programming will be based on each child's IEP and may entail supplemental and extended programming.
6. All students, staff, and visitors will be required to wear a face-covering unless doing so would inhibit the individual's health.
7. School District planning is based on CDC, State, and local guidelines.

Planning for the highest quality educational experience is ongoing, including but not limited to instruction and assessment, curricular resources, distance learning, social emotional support, technology needs, health and hygiene practices, extracurricular activities, and athletics. Please expect frequent communication from our school district over the next few weeks.

Please feel free to attend our next Board of Education meeting on Wednesday, August 5 at 7:30 pm as additional updates on the reopening of schools will be discussed. You can access the remote link on the day of the meeting: [Board Meeting Information](#).

Thank you for your continued support.

Sincerely,

Damion Macioci

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