



****IMPORTANT****

Please carefully review this update as it contains important information regarding changes to our upcoming learning phases. For easy reference, important takeaways from the updated protocols discussed in this update are available in the [Phase III Overview infographic](#).

March 30, 2021

Dear Paramus Community,

We can all agree that this past year has been unlike any other. Even during the times when the impact of the pandemic has handed us what may appear to be insurmountable challenges, our students, staff, and families have confronted those challenges head-on to make sure our students as a whole can continue to thrive. And despite the fact that our schools are operating in the midst of a global pandemic, our staff and students continue to enjoy the benefits of a safe and robust learning environment, whether in person or fully remote.

Over the course of little over a month, a number of significant changes have occurred that impact both our community and school communities across New Jersey. Below is a general overview of those changes:

- March 9, 2021: Phase II begins in Paramus. All in-person learners begin attending school four days per week.
- March 15, 2021: All school staff in New Jersey become eligible for the COVID-19 vaccine. *Due in large part to the subsequent incredible efforts of the Paramus Board of Health, our Paramus parent/guardian volunteer group, and our individual staff volunteers, over 90% of our Paramus school staff have either been fully or partially vaccinated as of today, March 30--just two weeks after becoming eligible.*
- March 22, 2021: Virtual Mondays are changed to hybrid learning days. As a result, all in-person learners now attend school five days per week.
- March 23, 2021: Following updates by the CDC, the NJDOH updates its own [health guidelines for schools](#). While the updated guidelines contain multiple changes (highlighted in yellow in the attached document), some of the most significant changes for the operation of schools are:
 - Elementary School: The recommendation to reduce social distancing measures from 6 feet to 3 feet in all [risk levels](#).
 - Middle School/High School: The recommendation to reduce social distancing measures from 6 feet to 3 feet in low/moderate risk levels while keeping 6 feet in high risk level.
- March 24, 2021: Governor Murphy announces that, starting with the 2021-2022 school year, he will no longer provide a full-remote learning option.

As I have consistently communicated throughout this school year, our district is committed to maintaining flexibility in light of changing guidelines from the health experts. Since our [initial protocols for Phase II and Phase III](#) were developed prior to the start of the updates detailed above, it was incumbent upon us to conduct a comprehensive review of our plans in consideration of these changes to ensure we continue to meet our goal of increasing in-person learning opportunities for our students when it is safe to do so.

To that end, please **carefully** review the following pages as they contain clarifications on the role the NJDOE/NJDOH guidelines are designed to play as well as detailed information regarding the projected plans for the remainder of the 2020-2021 school year in Paramus.



School Reopening Guidelines (NJDOE/NJDOH)

What Are the Guidelines?

- The NJDOE has provided multiple sources to be utilized as guidelines for continued school reopening.
 - [The Road Back: Restart and Recovery Plan for Education](#)
 - [COVID-19 Public Health Recommendations for Local Health Departments for K-12 Schools](#)
 - Executive Orders by the Governor
 - Local Boards of Health
 - Local Health Data
- These various sources encompass well over 130 pages of information, in addition to the information gleaned from local health data.
- Local school districts must look at all available data in making decisions regarding the continued reopening of schools for in-person learning.

How Are the Guidelines Utilized?

- Districts are obligated to safely move toward a full reopening of schools for in-person learning.
 - As local, state, and national health data change, it is essential that districts responsibly modify their plans accordingly.
- The guidelines are designed to be approached **holistically**.
 - Example: Social Distancing
 - Many people focus only on the words “recommend” or “to the maximum extent practicable” with regard to social distancing guidelines and mistakenly believe these distancing guidelines can therefore be dismissed outright.
 - Many people **also** mistakenly believe that, just because a recommendation is included in the guidelines, it must be incorporated as a mandate into a district’s plans no matter what.
 - Multiple other data points and pieces of information must be considered. It is important to not disregard the remaining 130 pages of guidelines in favor of focusing solely on a single statement.
- It is essential that districts maintain a balance between mitigating the “risk of disease transmission with the benefits of offering in-person instruction to as many children as possible.”



Phase III/Phase IV (Paramus Public Schools)

Phase III/Phase IV Context

- **Important Factors to Consider**
 - Risk of Transmission
 - Like most of New Jersey, our region (Northeast) is currently in the [high \(orange\) risk level for COVID-19 transmission](#).
 - While our initial prerequisite for the implementation of Phase III required our region to be at moderate (yellow) risk for two consecutive weeks, there are now several significant mitigating factors that did not exist before that must now be considered, including:
 1. *Data and experience continue to show that the risk of COVID-19 transmission within schools is incredibly small.*
 2. *A significant percentage of Paramus residents and school staff have been vaccinated at rates well above average, providing a pathway to safely reduce restrictions.*
 3. *We have ample data to support the fact that we have had incredible success this year in implementing and adhering to health and safety protocols.*
 - In holistically approaching the guidelines, the enhanced safety measures and positive health data inherent to the Paramus Public Schools provide clear indicators that the learning environment at all levels will continue to be safe for in-person learners at a social distance measure of 3 feet in **all grade levels**.
 - Consistency
 - While the updated guidelines recommend 3 feet of distance between elementary school students at all risk levels and between middle/high school students at the moderate/low risk levels (6 feet at high risk level), it is important to balance the “risk of disease transmission with the benefits of offering in-person instruction to as many children as possible.” With the above factors considered, we are prepared to enter the next phase of our continued reopening plans as detailed below.

Phase III Protocols/Timeline

Start Date (Phase III):

- Monday, April 12, 2021.

Key Characteristics (Phase III):

- In-person learning will continue to take place five days per week.
- The start/end times to the school day will remain unchanged.
- The option for students to participate in a full-remote learning model will continue to remain until the end of the 2020-2021 school year.
- Social distancing between students of at least six feet will be maintained to the maximum extent practicable in school/on the school bus at all levels (elementary/middle/high). *However, there will likely be scenarios in which such distance between students is not possible. In those cases, the maximum distance possible will still be utilized.*
- Social distancing between staff members and between staff members/students will remain at 6 feet.

Protocols (Phase III):

- Beginning today, March 30, parents/guardians must re-commit their children to a selected learning model (hybrid or full-remote) for Phase III. This selection must be entered in the [Genesis Parent Portal](#) by **no later than Monday, April 5**.
- After April 5, no changes to the selected learning model will be allowed for the duration of Phase III. Any needs-based requests for exceptions to this policy must be made directly to the building principal who will review such requests on a case-by-case basis.
- On **Monday, April 12**, students will begin with their newly-chosen learning models.
- The current policy that requires in-person learners to transition to a full-remote learning model after two unexcused “Present-Remote” days is eliminated. Instead, building principals will handle attendance concern situations on a case-by-case basis by reviewing the circumstances with the student and the student’s parents/guardians.



Phase IV Protocols/Timeline

Start Date (Phase IV):

- The start of Phase IV is contingent upon the ability to safely accommodate students and staff for full days of in-person learning. The administrative team continues to actively explore solutions for adequate spacing and consistency in scheduling and remains optimistic that a full day model will be implemented prior to the end of this school year.
- It is anticipated that if it is possible to implement Phase IV at any or all levels (elementary/middle/high) this school year, it would commence during the first or second week of May.

Key Characteristics (Phase IV):

- In-person learning will continue to take place five days per week.
- The start/end times to the school day will be adjusted to a full day model, including lunch.
- The option for students to participate in a full-remote learning model will continue to remain until the end of the 2020-2021 school year.
- As in Phase III, social distancing between students of at least six feet will continue to be maintained to the maximum extent practicable in school/on the school bus at all levels (elementary/middle/high). However, there will likely be scenarios in which such distance between students is not possible. In those cases, the maximum distance possible will still be utilized.
- During lunch, students will be placed at least six feet apart and will be separated by plexiglass barriers/desk shields.
- Social distancing between staff members and between staff members/students will continue to remain at 6 feet.

Protocols (Phase IV):

- Prior to any potential implementation of Phase IV, parents/guardians will be provided another opportunity to change their children's learning models (in-person or full-remote).
- Once the Phase IV learning model selection is made, no changes to the selected learning model will be allowed for the duration of Phase IV. Any needs-based requests for exceptions to this policy must be made directly to the building principal who will review such requests on a case-by-case basis.

If you have any questions about the phases or the updated health protocols, please reach out to your child's principal for assistance. You may also submit questions through the [Questions and Comments](#) section of the [Paramus Community Connections](#) website.

Finally, please remember to select your child's Phase III learning model (hybrid or full-remote) in the [Genesis Parent Portal](#) by no later than **Monday, April 5**.

Thank you and stay safe.

Sincerely,

Sean Adams
Superintendent of Schools