

Superintendent Report: Third Trimester Planning



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Agenda

- Report on:
 - The road we've traveled
 - The revised CDC guidelines
 - The NJDOH COVID-19 Activity Level Report
- Trimester Three
- Plans for September

Road we've traveled for almost a year...

- March 12, 2020 marked the beginning of our transition from school being delivered in a traditional way.
- Since then it has been our goal to provide education to students while maintaining the safety of students and staff. We have considered students' academic, social and emotional needs in our decisions.
- At the start of the year, we shared the Restart and Recovery Plan, which followed the requirements of the New Jersey Department of Education and the New Jersey Department of Health. The NJDOE guidelines said schools must follow the CDC guidelines, as well.

Road we've traveled for almost a year...

- Following NJDOE guidance, our reopening plan:
 - Required mask wearing;
 - Followed the six-feet social distancing recommendation;
 - Encouraged hand-washing or hand sanitizing;
 - Kept students in cohorts to prevent mixing of groups as much as possible;
 - Established contact tracing with the Mid-Bergen Health Department;
 - Established thorough facility cleaning protocols;
 - Prioritized students' social-emotional and mental health through ICARE and Advisory periods; and
 - Established daily symptom screening for all students and staff.

The NJDOE guidance was updated throughout the year.
We posted the updates on our website and made adjustments as required.

Road we've traveled for almost a year...

- Parents chose a learning model for their students - either hybrid or fully virtual.
- For trimester two, we were able to make some small alterations to the schedule at both schools:
 - At Hillside School, we increased the length of instructional day by twenty minutes with an 8:20 a.m. start time.
 - At the middle school we increased the class duration of each period from 45 minutes to 55 minutes for both hybrid and fully virtual.
- We accommodated 82 requests to change learning models for trimester two.
 - 58 from hybrid to fully virtual.
 - 24 from fully virtual to hybrid.

Road we've traveled for almost a year...

- Both schools established Pandemic Response Teams, which include administrators, teachers/staff, nurse, and parent representatives. The teams have met monthly to identify successes and identify challenges. They have been especially responsive in addressing issues and have reviewed school-based COVID-19 data. This data is shared with me.
- Our Administrative Team met daily through the fall, and every Wednesday since to discuss how we are managing instruction during the pandemic, while maintaining safety for students and staff. This often included managing response to COVID-19 cases and exposure to COVID-19 within our community.
- I updated the Board and the community at every Board meeting this year.

Revised CDC Guidelines: February 13, 2021

- The update offers a few key changes. They now include color-coded charts that divide schools' reopening options into four zones: Blue, yellow, orange and red. The areas are defined by county.
 - Schools in areas with low community spread of the coronavirus (blue, 0 to 9 new cases per 100,000 in past seven days) or moderate transmission (yellow, 10 to 49 new cases) are encouraged to consider reopening for full, in-person learning.
 - Schools in areas with substantial transmission (orange, 50 to 99 new cases per 100,000) may still consider a limited reopening, as long as they can layer multiple safety strategies in the classroom. In hard-hit communities (red, more than 100 new cases per 100,000), elementary schools may consider limited reopening, with physical distancing required, but the CDC recommends middle and high schools be virtual-only unless mitigation strategies can be met. This is because older students are more likely to transmit the virus.
- Bergen County is currently in a red zone: 263 cases per 100,000; 8.8% positivity rate. We have not moved to fully virtual for Tenakill Middle School though, because we have met the mitigation strategies. **BUT WE ARE STILL IN AN AREA WITH A LOT OF CASES!**

Revised CDC Guidelines: February 13, 2021

Mitigation Strategies

- Universal and correct use of masks
- Physical distancing - 6 feet in classrooms. (The Mid-Bergen Health Department which directs our safety said this week that they are still requiring six-feet of social distancing in our classrooms.) Cohorts are recommended in yellow, orange and red levels.
- Handwashing and respiratory etiquette
- Cleaning and maintaining healthy facilities
- Contact tracing in combination with isolation and quarantine, in collaboration with the health department

NJDOH COVID-19 Activity Level Report

- The NJDOH issues a COVID-19 Activity Level Report weekly, every Friday. The report provides the case rate per 100,000 and percent positivity. This report identifies four colors: green (low), yellow (moderate), orange (high) and red (very high).
- The state is divided into six regions. Closter is in the Northeast Region.
- For the past 14 weeks (11/14/20 - 2/13/21), the Northeast Region has been in the orange level (high).
- Last week's report for Northeast Region: 28.65 per 100,000 case rate and 8.33 percent positivity.

NJDOH COVID-19 Activity Level Report

- We closely monitor this information along with the number of exposures and COVID-19 cases within Closter. The total number of cases in Closter have been low, but they have tipped upward in past few weeks.
 - We are at a cumulative number of 480 cases in town. That is 5.6% of the population.
 - While this number is low, it is important to note that there has been a rapid increase in new cases (200) from January 1, 2021 - February 24, 2021.
- The Executive County Superintendent, Louis Delisio, directed that we must adhere to the guidance of our local health department. Mid-Bergen Health Department and Closter Department of Health directed that we must follow the NJDOH regional activity levels and we must follow the six-feet of social distance in all classrooms.

Trimester Three

- As we did for Trimester Two, we are trying to consider any way to increase instructional time for students, while still maintaining safety through COVID-19 mitigation strategies.
- We are still required to maintain social distancing in classrooms and to keep students in separated groups.
- While the number of COVID-19 cases in Closter are low, our families don't only stay in Closter! Parents work in other towns and many families travel. We currently have 93 hybrid students in quarantine due to travel. Since September 2020, we have had on average 10 students or staff per week in quarantine due to COVID-19 exposure. Thankfully, due to everyone's cooperation, we only had to move five classes to fully virtual for symptom monitoring/quarantine since September and we have only had three incidents of the whole school having to move to fully virtual for quarantine - 2 at Tenakill and 1 at Hillside.

Trimester Three

- Our survey was intended to gather information so we would know what parent preferences were if we could make changes. Some of the options included language that was intended to provide transparency and disclosure that changes in one schedule may impact another schedule. It was not intended to sway or alarm anyone.
- We had responses for 825 students, with 59% of responses for students currently in hybrid and 41% of responses for students currently in virtual - which is representative of the percentages in both options.

Trimester Three

- The factors impacting parents' choice of learning model:
 - COVID-19 related concerns and safety: 46.3 %
 - My child performs better in this model: 43.27%
 - Parent work schedule: 1.7%
 - Other: 8.73%
- If the school schedule were to remain the same as it is currently, what is your plan for trimester three:
 - 85.68% would not change
 - 4.53 % would switch from fully virtual to hybrid
 - 0.24% would switch from hybrid to fully virtual
 - 9.55 % were not sure yet

Trimester Three

- Which option would you prefer:
 - Keeping the current schedule with hybrid and virtual students remaining with their current teachers and hybrid students attending in-person learning on A or B days: **55.32%**
 - A rearranged schedule so that hybrid students would come to school in-person for four or five half-days per week. This would likely require students being assigned to a different teacher. It would also likely require fully-virtual learning to change from its current format to having the fully-virtual students watching a live stream of hybrid classes: **44.68%**

Trimester Three

- A revised schedule may result in students in one grade coming to school more frequently than siblings in a grade level with a higher number of hybrid students. If this is the case, which hybrid schedule would you prefer:
 - I prefer to have all of my children in school and at-home on the same days, understanding that they will be watching a live-stream via Zoom on the days they are at home. **49.08%**
 - I prefer to have each child attend in-person learning as many days as possible, even if a sibling in a different grade must remain at home on some days and watch a live-stream via Zoom on the days they are at home. **50.92%**

Trimester Three

- Currently, the Tenakill Middle School schedule has core subjects meeting every other day, with the exception of language arts which meets every day. For trimester three, which of the following would you prefer in the hybrid format:
 - Keeping the current schedule (ELA every day, math with teacher on in-person day and a recorded math lesson for at-home day). **55.73%**
 - A revised schedule in which students would have core subjects every single day (in-person with the teacher on in-school day; watching a live stream of the same teacher's lesson on the at-home day). To do this, we would have to reduce periods from 60 minutes to 45 minutes. This would increase the amount of screen time on the at-home days, as students will be required to watch the live-stream of all five core content areas. **44.27%**

Trimester Three

- Currently, the Tenakill Middle School schedule has core subjects meeting every other day, with the exception of language arts which meets every day. For trimester three, which of the following would you prefer in the hybrid format:
 - Keeping the current schedule (ELA every day, math with teacher on in-person day and a recorded math lesson for at-home day). **55.73%**
 - A revised schedule in which students would have core subjects every single day (in-person with the teacher on in-school day; watching a live stream of the same teacher's lesson on the at-home day). To do this, we would have to reduce periods from 60 minutes to 45 minutes. This would increase the amount of screen time on the at-home days, as students will be required to watch the live-stream of all five core content areas. **44.27%**

Trimester Three

- How has your child been emotionally handling the challenges of this school year?
 - Not affected: 43.31%
 - Some social-emotional difficulty and/or anxiety: 47.73%
 - Significant social-emotional impact: 8.96%
- How has your child been emotionally handling concerns about Coronavirus & COVID-19?
 - Not affected: 57.06%
 - Some social-emotional difficulty and/or anxiety: 39.26%
 - Significant social-emotional impact: 3.68%

Trimester Three

- Please rate the effectiveness of the daily advisory period for assisting your child with staying on track academically:
 - Highly effective: 16.19%
 - Effective: 26.63%
 - Neutral: 34.30%
 - Partially Effective: 7.83%
 - Ineffective: 15.14%
- Highly Effective/Effective: 43.42%
- Partially Effective/Ineffective: 22.973%

Trimester Three

- Please rate the effectiveness of the daily advisory period for assisting your child with staying connected with a trusted adult in school:
 - Highly effective: 24.28%
 - Effective: 27.15%
 - Neutral: 33.94%
 - Partially Effective: 6.27%
 - Ineffective: 8.36%
- Highly Effective/Effective: 51.43%
- Partially Effective/Ineffective: 14.63%

Trimester Three

- The advisory period is a valued part of my child's day.
 - Agree: 49.35%
 - Disagree: 21.67%%
 - Not sure: 28.98%
- So overall, the data from the survey regarding possibilities is split very closely. I understand this could be for a variety of reasons, such as not wanting to have teacher changes, not really liking either option, etc. Parents have communicated with the Board and me this week about this. We understand all of your concerns because we share them too.

Trimester Three

- We expect that during the second public comment section there will be parents who want increased in-school time for hybrid students and that there will be virtual parents who want their virtual classes to continue. The Board and I want to be able to provide more in-person learning without changing the virtual learning model. But it is going to be a challenge to do so. We don't want our community divided over these challenges.

Trimester Three

- Some school-based information might be helpful in understanding the challenges.
- Hillside Elementary School
 - Fully virtual: 244 (40.7%)
 - Hybrid: 356 (59.3%)
 - K attends five days a week due to a smaller hybrid enrollment
 - 40 special education and ELL students attend five days a week based on their unique needs
- Tenakill Middle School
 - Fully virtual: 242 (44.4%)
 - Hybrid: 303 (55.6%)
 - 20 special education and ELL students attend five days a week based on their unique needs

Trimester Three

- Hillside Elementary School
 - Most classrooms can accommodate 14 or 15 students with six feet of social distance, with hybrid class enrollment ranging from 17 - 24 students - many classes have paraprofessionals in addition to the teacher, who must be included in the social distancing requirement.
 - We do have four rooms that can accommodate 18 or 20 students with six feet of social distance and they are being used for PreK and K, which now have students attending every day.
- Tenakill Middle School
 - Most classrooms can accommodate 13 students with six feet of social distance, with hybrid class enrollment ranging from 16 - 23 students -many classes have paraprofessionals in addition to the teacher, who must be included in the social distancing requirement.

Trimester Three

- So, based on the parent survey leaning slightly toward keeping schedules the same, along with the challenges of accommodating all hybrid students at the same time and the level of COVID-19 activity in the high zone, I am leaning toward a recommendation that we begin the third trimester continuing with our current model for both hybrid and fully virtual learners.
- This leaning is with the understanding that we could continue working toward increasing in-person learning for hybrid students when our the Northeastern Region has returned to moderate transmission for at least three consecutive weeks and if the NJDOH or NJDOE reduces the requirement of six feet of social distancing in the classroom - which is rumored to be happening in the next few weeks.
- We will certainly hear community comments, from both parents and teachers, tonight on this before the decision is final.

Trimester Three

- We will have a school-level Zoom meeting for elementary parents and one for middle school parents in the coming weeks to answer questions about trimester three, and parents will then get to make a choice in the Realtime Parent Portal if they want to change their child's instructional model.
- Also, teachers who do not have underlying conditions are not yet eligible for vaccination. The vaccination of teachers is a vital step in moving closer to increased in-school time. The Board will vote tonight on approving a resolution encouraging Governor Murphy to prioritize the vaccination of educators and school employees. I encourage all parents also to write to Governor Murphy and the District 39 legislators to make this happen. Thank you to Mikelle Schifter, one of our parents, for sharing links with parents to do this.

Plans for September

- Over the last week, the Board and I have received many letters as part of a community letter-writing campaign to know what plans are for September 2021.
- While we have been working on plans for trimester three, along with managing the day to day operations of the district, our administrative team have had preliminary discussions about the return to school in September 2021 over the past month or so.
- Once trimester three is underway, we will continue working on the plans for September 2021. It is six months away and so much can change by then, but we are hopeful that it will be a return to normal school.

Plans for September

- From meetings I have had at the state and county level, the word has been that we should be able to return to school with students back every day, barring any issues with variants of the COVID-19 virus. There will still likely be some mitigation strategies still in effect, such as required mask-wearing into 2022.
- We will prepare for a regular opening and a Plan B, just in case there are social distancing requirements. My thoughts are that if we had to offer virtual learning, it would then be in a different format, such as live streaming, at the start of a new year.

Closing

- Again, the Board and I have received many letters this week. I have attempted to answer as many as possible. I want nothing more than to have all students back in school as soon and as safely as possible.
- As a Closter School community - Board, administrators, teachers, staff, students, parents and townspeople - we have worked together and made sacrifices to get to this point. We will get through this together.