



October 15, 2020

Dear WTPS Families and Staff,

Each day I receive several communications from parents wondering about plans to increase in-person instructional time in our schools. I have taken the time to communicate with each of them, but because I believe this is a relevant question throughout the community, I thought a general update on this matter may be helpful.

Currently, our district remains in the hybrid schedule that was developed as part of our [reopening plan](#); however, we are in the process of making significant amendments to that plan. As you may imagine, we have learned much about the effectiveness of our current plan, including what is working and what areas need to be adjusted. I trust we will continue to learn, evaluate, and refine as we move forward.

Last week, Mr. McGee communicated some sweeping changes at the secondary level, and we expect to release information on changes at the elementary level in the coming days.

Our goal always has been to open our schools and do all that we could to keep our students and staff safe. The hybrid instructional model was developed in response to the New Jersey Department of Education's Road Back Plan. A major component of that plan was the directive to social distance our students six feet apart. This safety measure required us to limit our school population in order to reopen our schools. Since we have reopened, our schools have dealt with multiple positive COVID-19 cases. In some instances, these cases have led to the temporary closure of school buildings. Despite these positive cases, we have been diligent in maintaining the social distance of six feet between our students within our buildings, and in doing so have been able to help prevent transmission and negate further closures.

When staff and students are six feet apart and wearing their face masks, the health department does not consider them a "close contact" of any positive case that may be in their classroom. If they were seated closer than six feet of a positive case, they would be considered a "close contact" and required to quarantine for at least 14 days. Our socially distant seating has avoided this scenario, allowing our students to continue attending school and limiting transmissions that could lead to full school closures.

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We do not have a timeline in place to expand the numbers of students that can attend at the same time. Our classrooms' physical space, combined with the number of students we have receiving in-person instruction, would not permit social distancing as outlined in the New Jersey Department of Education's Guidelines. However, we are looking at other ways to expand the amount of time students will be engaged in live instruction. That is the essence of the adjustments made at the secondary level, and it is the goal of the forthcoming adjustments at the elementary level.

There is no one who would disagree that getting all our kids back to school safely and fully, as soon as possible, is the great hope. This is a significant challenge for all concerned. Our staff never has worked harder and have no greater desire than to continue to do all they can for their students; however, we share in what is the mounting frustration of all involved. I receive letters and phone calls of concern from parents, staff, and students daily. Many see what may be happening in other districts and wonder why we may not be doing some of those same things. Please know that we have examined many options, but every district is different and must make the best decision possible according to their many unique factors. It is the reason why the New Jersey Department of Education did not dictate a specific plan for every district. There are parameters and dynamics that vary from one district to another that dictate what can and what cannot happen.

We do appreciate your feedback and hearing your concerns. We are working tirelessly to monitor our programs, adjust, and do the very best we can to safely educate our students. I once again thank you for your ongoing support and trust as we all continue to move forward under these most trying circumstances.

Sincerely,



Joseph N. Bollendorf  
Superintendent