

# Chesterfield Township School District

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Dear Chesterfield Elementary School Community,

Happy Thursday! This week I have several informational topics to share with you. I apologize for the length of this letter. Please know my intent is to continue to keep our school community informed during the pandemic.

## **Transportation**

The school district's transportation service has operated five daily bus runs for many years. Due to the pandemic, and specifically the limit we've placed on the number of students we place on a bus, we will need to add an additional run on Tuesdays and Thursdays. When we were planning for the school year, and in consultation with our transportation provider, we set a maximum of 22 students on a bus. A typical 54 passenger bus has 11 rows with one seat on each side of the aisle. We set the maximum number of students on the bus at 22 students so we can seat one student alone on each seat. We currently have more students utilizing transportation services than we anticipated. Our Monday, Wednesday, and Thursday bus runs are operating as planned and do not exceed 22 students. However, three of our Tuesday/Friday runs have the potential to exceed 22 students. On Friday, October 23<sup>rd</sup>, we had one of our buses exceed 22 students. On Tuesday, October 27<sup>th</sup>, we had another bus exceed 22 students. To ensure the health and safety of our students using the bus, we are adding a bus to our Tuesday/Friday runs. The addition of a 6<sup>th</sup> run will ensure no bus exceeds the 22 student maximum. The addition of the sixth bus run may require a change in pick-up and drop-off times for some students. That change should be minimal. Parents will be notified today of any changes in drop-off and pick up times. Thank you in advance to these families affected by the change. We appreciate your flexibility as we adjust and ensure the health and safety of our bus students.

## **Changing Instructional Models**

As we approach the end of the first trimester we are preparing for requests to change student instructional models. I want to provide parents with an update on this process so everyone is informed and clearly understands the specifics of how changes will be made.

## Grades K-1

Due to the structure of the kindergarten and 1<sup>st</sup> grade Fully In-Person Instructional Model, students who move between the fully virtual model and the fully in-person model will need to change teachers/class as described in the original plan. At this time we do not have an option for a student to be fully virtual and placed with a teacher who teaches in-person only.

## Grades 2-6

In the original plan, students were to be placed in two types of classrooms, (1) hybrid and (2) virtual. The reason for the two classrooms was the fact that our original plan did not call for live instruction from the classroom teacher in the hybrid model. Thus, if a student was completely virtual and placed in a hybrid class, the majority of instruction would have been via teacher created videos. Obviously, we made an adjustment to the plan and our teachers are providing live instruction to virtual students in both the hybrid model and the fully virtual model. Due to the change in how we are delivering instruction in the hybrid model, if a child is placed in a hybrid classroom and decides to move to a fully virtual model, the child can make that change without changing classrooms. The student will simply not attend on the in-person cohort days. This allows us to better control our class size, especially in our fully virtual classrooms.

For those students in the fully virtual model who want to switch to the hybrid model, a change in classroom will be necessary. The fully virtual teachers are teaching virtually and are not in the building. Thus, when a child moves from virtual to hybrid, the child will be assigned to a hybrid classroom/teacher.

As you know, we continue to stress the importance of keeping your child home if experiencing symptoms of illness. Since we are providing students in the hybrid model with live instruction whether in-person or virtual, parents of students in the hybrid model may have their child participate virtually on their in-person cohort day if they are not feeling well. Thus, if your child is experiencing symptoms of illness on an in-person instruction cohort day and you keep your child home, if able, your child may still participate in the school day virtually. This is important in our current environment where a student may be experiencing symptoms (sore throat, cough, etc.) but not so bad that they need to miss instruction for the day.

## **Fully In-Person Instructional Model for All Students**

The topic of moving to in-person learning for all students K-6 was recently discussed at the Board of Education meeting. As you know, we currently offer this option to our K and first grade students. When we investigated this option in the summer for grades 2-6, we determined it was not feasible. At the request of the Board of Education, we revisited this idea. To bring our students back five days a week at all grade levels would require an additional 12 teachers/classrooms. There are several other factors that were also considered, but simply based on the need for the additional teachers and classroom space, this option is not feasible. The other option would be to bring back students, but not practice social distancing. Rather than social distancing, we would use barriers in the classroom. In consultation with our health professionals, bringing people into the school without social distancing is not advisable. Specifically, our district physician suggests revisiting this idea after the

holidays, but suggests no changes at this point due to the surge in cases in our state and country. The Department of Health (DOH) clearly states that barriers do not negate the need for social distancing. The DOH considers social distancing vital and does not recommend people be closer than 6 feet.

We will continue to monitor the pandemic, especially in the Chesterfield region. If we see changes that may impact this decision, we will reevaluate the decision and act accordingly. I have said this before: we all want our students back in school, but we need to make sure we do it in a manner that is safe for students, staff and visitors.

### **Student Drop-Off**

After monitoring the arrival process for the last two weeks, we have made the decision to allow parents to drop off their child along Saddle Way in the morning. Due to the reduced number of students attending school each day, we feel we are able to use the bus lane along the front sidewalk as a drop off for students. However, please be aware of the following:

1. Parents may use the bus lane along Saddle Way as a student drop off location only after all buses have left the drop off lane. This includes our five 54 passenger buses and our one 25 passenger bus. **IF YOU SEE A BUS OF ANY SIZE IN THE BUS LANE ANYWHERE ALONG SADDLE WAY, DO NOT ENTER THE BUS LANE.** All of our buses typically depart the bus lane by 8:40.
2. The sidewalk along the staff parking lot will still be used as a drop off location. We will have staff in both areas.
3. If at any time there is a line waiting to drop off along Saddle Way, parents will be asked to drive into the staff parking lot and drop off along the sidewalk in the staff parking lot to avoid a backup on the circle.
4. All other normal drop off procedures remain in place. For example, students should always exit the vehicle on the sidewalk side. Students should be prepared to exit the vehicle as soon as it is stopped to keep the flow of cars moving.
5. To be clear, I want to repeat, **IF YOU SEE A BUS OF ANY SIZE IN THE BUS LANE ANYWHERE ALONG SADDLE WAY, DO NOT ENTER THE BUS LANE.**

The October Parent Survey will be sent out tomorrow. Please take the time to complete the survey. Your feedback continues to help shape our decision-making moving forward.

The upcoming NJEA Convention and Thanksgiving weekends are a time when families tend to travel. We are asking for your continued support in having your child self-quarantine if traveling to a state on the NJ Travel Advisory List. As a school community we've been working collaboratively to keep our students and staff healthy and safe and to keep our school open for in-person learning. As we see the number of cases rise in our state, we need to continue to be vigilant in following health and safety protocols to ensure the health and safety of everyone as well as to keep our school open to in-person learning.

Next week is a short week due to Election Day and the New Jersey Education Association Convention. As a reminder, school will be closed on Tuesday, November 3<sup>rd</sup> for Election Day and Thursday and Friday for the convention. Due to the short week, the next "Thursday Letter" will be sent out on Thursday, November 12<sup>th</sup>.

As I indicated last week, I have added a COVID-19 Weekly Health Report to the Thursday letter. Below is the cumulative report:

### COVID-19 Weekly Health Report

Week of.....	# of Positive Cases in School*	# of Students/Staff Sent Home Due to Symptoms	# of Students/Staff Quarantined & Why	# of Incidents of Non-Compliance
Sept. 28 <sup>th</sup>	0	0	0	0
Oct. 5 <sup>th</sup>	0	1 student	1 staff (close contact) 2 students pending results (returned 10/9 – negative COVID-19 results)	0
Oct. 12 <sup>th</sup>	0	1 student (returned 10/15 – cleared w/ alternate diagnosis) 2 staff	1 staff/close contact 2 staff (symptoms – negative COVID-19 results)	0
Oct. 19 <sup>th</sup>	0	0	0	0
Oct. 26 <sup>th</sup>	0	0	1 staff (close contact)	0

Stay safe and healthy!

Sincerely,

*Scott Heino*

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