

Fair Lawn Public Schools

37-01 Fair Lawn Avenue, Fair Lawn, NJ

(201) 794-5500 x7090

Email: nnorcia@fairlawnschools.org

Nicholas J. Norcia
Superintendent of Schools

August 17, 2020,

Dear Fair Lawn Parents/Guardians,

As you are aware, our educational world was upended in March 2020 with the COVID-19 pandemic. At that time, schools were ordered to close and engage in remote learning. While we thought at the time it would be a temporary option, we found ourselves immersed in the virtual learning world until the end of the school year and into July for some of our students. Making matters more complex were the ever changing guidance documents released from the State. Yet again, we are faced with new guidance which is why I am writing this letter to the community today.

The Fair Lawn Re-Opening plan presented to the public on July 30th and submitted to the Department of Education was based on the most recent data available at that time. We were highly aware of the need to make adjustments as new data and guidelines (i.e., wearing masks) were released.

During the month of July, District Staff engaged in a broad based research of critical items which would then lead to a full scope purchasing process. This included but was not limited to: PPE, more typical nursing supplies, antiseptic wipes, hand sanitizer, technology items and upgrades, plexiglass for common areas, upgrades to ventilation systems and additional ventilation systems. As we began to learn, these items were in high demand all across the State.

Most recently, on Wednesday, August 12th, New Jersey Governor Phil Murphy announced and issued Executive Order 175, stating that school districts may delay in-person learning related to concerns about safety standards and provide remote-only instruction in the fall.

The Central Office Administration and the Board of Education have decided, **reluctantly**, that we will be moving forward with an **all-virtual start to the school year for students in Pre-K through the 12th grade**, delaying the start of any in-person option.

The following important factors were considered in our decision making:

- Review of the district's "Opt Out Preference" form (to date approximately 25% of district families have submitted responses choosing to opt out of school);
- Staff medical leave submissions and requests for accommodations were received due to health concerns;
- An upgrade to our HVAC System to ensure fresh air quality in every classroom in Fair Lawn, which will take place beginning in September;
- The New Jersey Department of Health's new guidelines released on August 13th. This has been an ongoing concern of many community members about how will we handle a student or staff member who tests positive for COVID-19 and we only just received the information last week on recommendations on how to address these real life scenarios;
- On August 11, 2020, Dr. Richard Bozza, executive director of the New Jersey Association of School Administrators, Patricia Wright, executive director of the New Jersey Principals and Supervisors Association and Marie Blistan, president of the New Jersey Education Association, had issued a statement calling on Gov. Murphy and the New Jersey Department of Education to direct all New Jersey public schools to open remotely this fall;

"THE LEADERS OF TOMORROW ATTEND FAIR LAWN SCHOOLS TODAY"

Fair Lawn Public Schools

- Concerns about the back order of necessary PPE equipment and the ability to ensure the health and safety of staff/students;
- Consultation with local agencies and partners; and,
- Review of the instructional shift that many districts across our county, region, and state have recently announced to remote-only openings.

We know how disappointing this decision is. We know many of you are and will be frustrated and angry. We know this decision will create hardships for a significant number of you. But, based on all of the factors involved, we believe this is the best course of action at this time.

We will be keeping a close eye on the data and addressing the factors listed above to ensure the health and safety of students and staff, we will be setting an **in-person reopening date of October 19th**. This will be our new target date to phase in live instruction in our classrooms once again.

Ideally, we would like to provide an in-person learning environment beginning this September; however, we are facing a situation that is far from ideal. We prefer to err on the side of caution and begin the year virtually, albeit with **significant improvements to our distance learning model**. After much reflection about the distance learning model provided from March through June, **the distance learning model for September 2020 will include more live instruction/student-teacher engagement and closely resemble a traditional, full school day.**

As a former teacher, as a parent of an incoming Kindergarten student, and as your Superintendent, I understand that this revision will not be easy for many families. An in-person return for a district of our size (ten schools and over 5,000 students) in consideration of the new factors mentioned above is not an acceptable or comfortable provision to set forth at this time as Superintendent of Schools. Despite input from all stakeholders and the exhaustive efforts of all district staff, these new factors create a level of uncertainty which needs further analysis and time in order to properly prepare a safe and appropriate education for all students.

Over the next few weeks we will continue building a robust and quality *Distance Learning Model* for all students.

In conclusion, we will be submitting our request for 100% full remote learning to the NJDOE Bergen County office for approval.

Thank you for your understanding and stay safe.

Sincerely,



Nicholas J. Norcia, Superintendent of Schools



Ron Barbarulo, Board of Education President