

Flemington-Raritan Regional School District
Dr. Kari McGann
Superintendent of Schools
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February 26, 2021

Dear Flemington-Raritan Regional School District Parents and Community Members,

The COVID-19 pandemic has created immense challenges for communities, schools, families, students, and individuals. Faculty and staff members have focused their work to be agile to meet the evolving needs and respond to the effects resulting from the pandemic. Responding to needs as a result of the pandemic is more than just providing academics to students. In addition to providing instruction to meet the requirements of the New Jersey Student Learning Standards, our schools must provide opportunities for students to learn social and emotional skills, get exercise, receive healthy meals through our school meal programs, and have access to wraparound services to provide support for physical/occupational/speech therapy, mental health services, and physical health services. During the pandemic, these services are especially vital to our students.

According to the healthychildren.org website, all schools should aim to have students attend school in person, which is how they learn best ¹. For the past three weeks, the COVID-19 report delineates our Central West region in the “yellow.” Using data from the [COVID-19 reports](#), I have been making plans and having discussions with Board Members, building administrators, FREA Leadership, and local health officials to open our doors wider for students to return to school. According to the [CDC’s Operational Strategy for K-12 Schools through Phased Mitigation](#), our schools should be the first to reopen when they can do so safely².

This week’s [COVID-19 report](#) showed a shift for the entire state from a “high” activity level to a “moderate” level for activity. On February 25, 2021, the [COVID-19 New Jersey data dashboard](#) reported only 50 new confirmed cases for our entire county. The dashboard reports the New Jersey rate of transmission is 0.89. In August the transmission rate was reported at 1.48 in the State of New Jersey. Since January the [Hunterdon County Health Department](#) dashboard shows a downward trend in the number of cases for Hunterdon County.

On Monday night at the March 1, 2021 Board of Education meeting, I will recommend a revision to Policy 1648-Restart and Recovery Plan (M), [linked here](#). Upon approval by the Board, the revised policy allows for the implementation of additional mitigation strategies and an increase for in-person K-8 school learning modes. This means that the District will provide every student, faculty, and staff member with a barrier, traditionally referred to as Plexiglass divider. All faculty and staff members will have access to a face shield if they wish to utilize an additional layer of protection in addition to the facial covering (facemask) requirement when on campus. The agenda for the March 1 Board of Education meeting is [linked here](#).

As per [Board of Education Policy 1648.02](#), on March 15 students that have requested to return to in-person learning will be accommodated for cohort A week. The cohort A and cohort B schedule will be in effect for the week of March 15. Upon Board approval of the revised policy, beginning the week of March 22, all students from cohort A and cohort B will be accommodated to return for in-person learning. Cohorts will be combined to offer five-days of in-person instruction for all students who select to be in-person. An all-virtual learning model will still be available for those families that have selected that learning model. Trimester classes will remain as scheduled.

1

<https://www.healthychildren.org/English/health-issues/conditions/COVID-19/Pages/Return-to-School-During-COVID-19.aspx> (Safe Schools During the COVID-10 Pandemic)

2

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/downloads/community/schools-childcare/K-12-Operational-Strategy-02142021.pdf> (Coronavirus disease 2019)

The increase of students in the building will be accomplished by factoring in the guidance from the [American Academy of Pediatrics](#) COVID-19 Guidance for Safe Schools. According to the American Academy of Pediatrics, since the beginning of this pandemic, new information has emerged to guide the safety of schools³. Using this guidance, we will alter our current in-person schedule to return students to school five days a week by combining cohorts and continuing to operate on a half-day schedule. Our schools will continue to require universal and correct use of masks and add an additional layer of mitigation with the installation of barriers between students. As we prepare for more students to enter our buildings physical distance between desks will be placed at least three (3) feet apart and ideally six (6) feet apart.

If we continue to see the region stay in the “yellow” (or move into the “green”) and all indications are pointing in the right direction, meaning the case rate continues to decrease, percent positivity rates decrease, hospital rates decrease for the number of COVID-like illnesses, I will continue to make recommendations to alter our current in-person schedule to shift from an early release schedule to a full-day model. Until more data is available from the COVID-19 weekly reports and the District can demonstrate a successful combination of cohorts while maintaining safety for our community, we will maintain the early release schedule for all students. This means that our elementary students will continue to have lunch at school and students in grades five (5) through eight (8) will not eat lunch at school.

The Flemington-Raritan Regional School District will continue to rely on local health department guidance of COVID-19 trends. A fluctuation of the risk matrix may necessitate a shift in learning or a change of mitigation strategies in schools. Regardless of the level of community transmission, all schools will layer multiple mitigation strategies and follow protocols consistently. We are confident that our additional layers of protection for students, staff, and faculty will arrive in the district on, or before, the week of March 15, 2021.

Cohorts and Co-mingling

- An “all-virtual option” would continue to be offered to parents who select an all virtual option for their child.
- Cohort A and B would be co-mingled, therefore the cohort model will cease.
- Co-mingling with other cohorts/classes would continue to be minimized, as much as possible. However, some students will move between classes.
- Building principals will be communicating with parents specifics about your child’s individual schedule.
- Teachers that have received an accommodation request to teach virtually due to medical needs will need a substitute in the classroom to provide student supervision unless these teachers can be all virtual teachers.

Rotation

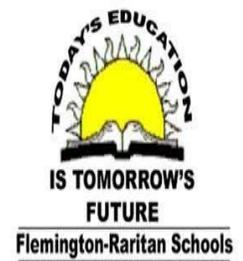
- The weekly rotation will no longer be necessary.
- Schedules will return to our “normal” Days 1-6 and Day A/B rotations.

Instruction

- With larger class sizes, we will resume full-scale intervention services to support struggling learners.
- In grades K-4, Science and Social Studies will resume being taught by the homeroom teacher.
- We will discontinue “check-in” times in the afternoon.
- Modifications to “specials/related arts” will be needed to prevent co-mingling and sharing of instructional

³
<https://services.aap.org/en/pages/2019-novel-coronavirus-covid-19-infections/clinical-guidance/covid-19-planning-considerations-return-to-in-person-education-in-schools/> (The American Academy of Pediatrics)

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- materials - to the greatest extent possible.
- Livestreaming instruction will be necessary for some classrooms to support students that are all virtual or quarantined due to exposure.

Upon Board of Education approval of the revision of Policy 1648, our dates in March will look different than previously published.

Date	Cohort A	Cohort B
March 1-5	Remote Learning	In-Person
March 8-12	In-Person	Remote Learning
March 15-19	Remote Learning	In-Person
March 22-26	Combining Cohorts A & B, five days a week, upon Board approval	
~Parents who selected all-virtual instruction for their child will continue with all-remote learning.~		

During the summer of 2020 district pandemic planning teams focused on the goal to bring students back for in-person learning for families who selected an in-person learning platform. Our Returning with Confidence teams planned for schools to reopen and remain open for in-person learning with layered mitigation strategies in place to help keep students, faculty, and staff members safe. We opened our doors for cohorts of students to return significantly before many other districts. When other school districts kept their doors closed for their students, our doors were open for Flemington-Raritan Regional School District students. After the winter break through the Martin Luther King, Jr. holiday, some school districts selected to close their school doors to their students. Our school doors remained open for our students. We are proud of our work to bring students back early, to keep our doors open, and to continue to work toward our ultimate goal -- to educate all students in school, all day, 180 days a year. We're not there yet, but each and every one of us, collectively and collaboratively, are taking great strides to get there.

Our teachers are critical to the continued functioning of our community and society. I ask that you continue to support them and the work that they are doing with your children. Please direct your frustrations to me and be kind to your principals and teachers who are working incredibly hard to continue to create a safe and welcoming learning environment in our schools. There are great things happening in our schools. I am immensely proud of the teaching and learning occurring in this school community every day.

COVID-19 Update

The District received notice of a positive COVID-19 case of a Reading-Fleming Intermediate School student who was last in their respective buildings on February 25. Our District nurses continue to follow all contact tracing guidelines from the Department of Health. We will continue to work with public health officials to keep the community spread low and the virus under control.

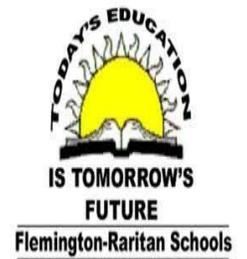
Substitutes Needed

Now more than ever, our district is in need of substitute teachers as we work to open doors wider for students while continuing to provide all-remote instruction to families that choose a virtual learning model. If you are interested in substituting in the District, [please click here for more information](#).

Community News:

Hunterdon County Children’s Interagency Coordinating Council (CIACC) would like to partner with the Department

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of Education in Hunterdon County and to offer services available through different agencies. CIACC is trying to assess the kind of services the students and the caregivers in Hunterdon County may need during the pandemic.

STUDENT - [Hunterdon County CIACC Student Survey](#)
CAREGIVER - [Hunterdon County CIACC Caregiver Survey](#)

If you have any additional questions, please contact Gregor Thomas, CIACC Coordinator, LCSW at gthomas@ccdom.org

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Kari McGann". The signature is written in a cursive style.

Dr. Kari McGann
Superintendent of Schools