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December 4, 2020

Dear Cherry Hill Public Schools Community,

As we finish this first week of December and our first week back to all-remote learning, I continue to receive questions from the community about decisions regarding whether to open our buildings to students. We continue to consult with the Camden County Department of Health and to follow CDC guidelines. All decisions have been made after long discussion and careful thought, always with the health and safety of our students and staff as the guiding principle. I would like to address some frequently asked questions:

Why are we remaining all-remote when in [the latest report \(11/28\)](#) Camden County was deemed “orange/high risk” rather than the predicted “red/very high risk”? While it may seem simple to interpret an orange/high risk designation in Camden County as a “green light” to open schools, there are many factors we must consider as we weigh the risks, benefits and feasibility of opening. The county has seen the positive infection rate of COVID-19 rise from 11.65% last week to 16.65% Thursday, December 3, 2020. This trend does not bode well for next week. Part of the issue is the greater likelihood of infections sweeping through our buildings and compromising the health of our nearly 11,000 students, 1,700 staff members and their families. When we switched back to all-remote learning, we were already challenged with classroom coverage due to teacher and educational assistant absences/permission to work from home, as substitute teachers are in short supply. This challenge will likely be exacerbated by the upward trend of COVID-19 cases.

How many teachers are needed to meet the needs of in-person instruction? The district is facing challenges with classroom coverage as teachers take sick time, are granted permission to work from home, and take leaves of absence for a variety of reasons, while the pool of substitute teachers statewide is very small. We also are doing our best to have teachers with appropriate experience and certifications (e.g., grade level and subject matter) teaching the specific classes for which they are trained. This means there is not a “magic number” of teachers that will satisfy our ability to offer effective in-person instruction.

Are students required to have their cameras on during their class times? Our students are strongly encouraged to keep their cameras on for remote learning, but they are not required to do so. This is addressed in our [WE Return to Learn Continuity of Learning guide](#), and has been communicated to staff. Students who choose to keep their cameras off are still expected to participate in class, respond when called on, etc. If students are not on camera and are not responsive to a teacher during class, the teacher and/or school counselor or school principal will follow up with the parents. Parents with specific questions or concerns should contact their child’s teacher or principal. We want all of our students to be connected and learning, and comfortable during the experience.

I appreciate the continued dialog with the community during this challenging time. We will be holding a second Virtual Town Hall Meeting on Monday, December 14 at 7 pm. I hope you will attend. A link to the meeting will be publicized in the coming days. Please continue to mask up, wash your hands frequently and stay socially distanced. All of these measures will help us have a successful return to our school buildings.

Stay well,

Joseph Meloche
Superintendent, Cherry Hill Public Schools