

August 30, 2020

Dear Parents and Caregivers,

I want to take a moment to welcome you and your children back to the 2020-21 school year! Our staff returned on Wednesday, August 26th and participated in our annual Back-to-School Convocation, which included personal pre-recorded messages from parents, Town leaders, Board of Education members, Newtown Police, and students. This year's Convocation was uploaded to YouTube and posted on our website. Thank you for sharing your heartfelt appreciation of our teachers and administrators – and wishing them well for the new school year.

Based on survey data, 85% of our families have opted to return students to school, with the remainder of families opting for remote learning. In preparation, teachers, staff, and leaders spent the first three days learning the health safety protocols outlined in Newtown's Re-Entry Plan and working with classroom technology that will support an interactive environment for both in-person and remote learners. Newtown Public School staff are prepared to implement health safety protocols, including the ongoing sanitization of touchpoints and bathrooms, appropriate use of PPE, and classroom designs that maximize social distancing. Our teachers continue to test the technology and related equipment that will support remote learning so students can remain actively engaged in live classroom instruction.

The lack of a fully interactive instructional model was cited as a concern following closure in March. Our planning allowed us to create a more interactive model for our remote learners to increase student engagement and accountability. While our building principals shared details about their school schedules, it is important to emphasize that attendance will be important for ALL students. We expect students to log into their classes as directed unless a parent or caregiver has communicated a legitimate absence. In concert with families, teachers will work to share instructional information students may have missed. We will also make families aware when classroom teachers will be absent due to extended medical leave or a need to quarantine. Whenever possible, and working collaboratively with qualified substitutes, teachers will be present virtually to support students through the implementation of lessons, assessments, academic supports, and parent communication.

Our Assistant Superintendent also sent information regarding our remote learning plans and the distribution of devices for families who identified their needs through a recent survey. While additional Chromebooks are on back order, we have an adequate number of devices to service families who requested district support. Our Technology Department is also working with families who requested help with Wi-Fi issues.

Our bus routes are posted on our website and monitors will be in place for the first two weeks of school. We want to remind all parents that every student boarding our buses will be required to wear a mask while traveling to and from school, and students will have assigned seats to ensure families remain together. A reminder that all students should be screened at home each day for temperature and signs of illness. Bus monitors will ride the entire MS/HS and Reed/Elementary routes in the morning and in the afternoons. Following the Department of Public Health (DPH) guidelines, buses will be cleaned daily and between bus runs.

Many families have shared an intent to drive their students to school. The times and protocols for parent drop off and pick up from each of our school campuses will be communicated by principals. The increase in parents driving to and from our campuses will likely increase traffic. We ask for your patience and support in allowing our students and staff to arrive and depart safely from our schools. *Please remember that Thursday, September 3 (Cohort A – in person) and Friday, September 4th (Cohort B- in person) are 3-hour early dismissal schedules.*

On a final note, we ask for your understanding and ongoing support as we launch the 2020-21 school year. While staff and leaders have worked diligently to learn new health safety protocols and implement new technologies in their classrooms, there may be “bumps” along the way. Wi-Fi issues or technology concerns may come up, but we promise to do our best to resolve these quickly.

Best wishes for a safe and productive school year. We look forward to welcoming your children back and working with them in the year ahead.

Sincerely,

Dr. Lorrie Rodrigue, Superintendent