



SCHOOL DISTRICT OF THE CHATHAMS

Office of the Superintendent

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Dear Parents and Staff Members,

I am writing to update you on the status of schools at present.

Covid cases in the district have increased dramatically since Thanksgiving, with the high school in particular experiencing a surge over the past week. As of this afternoon, our case counts over four-week increments from the beginning of the year are as follows:

School	8/30/2021 - 9/24/2021	9/25/2021 - 10/22/2021	10/23/2021 - 11/19/2021	11/20/2021 - 12/17/2021
Chatham High School	1	4	6	56
Chatham Middle School	8	1	2	23
Lafayette Avenue School	3	2	10	12
Milton Avenue School	2	1	0	4
Southern Boulevard School	1	3	1	6
Washington Avenue School	1	1	0	12

Given the increase in cases, some students, staff, and parents are understandably concerned and some have asked about whether the district will move to virtual instruction. From the beginning of the pandemic, and as expressed by entities like the World Health Organization and the American Academy of Pediatrics, any decision regarding the closure of school as a mitigation measure against Covid must be balanced with the impact that school closures have on the academic, social, and emotional development of children. Likely for this reason, these same entities have taken the position that schools should be among the last places in society to close. In addition, closing schools to prevent or reduce transmission is likely to have very limited impact if students do not similarly curtail other social, recreational, and extracurricular activities involving gatherings of people outside of school.

I have discussed the current case counts with our local Department of Health and members of our Board of Education. Collectively, our belief remains that in-person school is vital to students. Accordingly, the district will remain open on our regular schedules and there is no plan to transition to virtual instruction. The only caveat to this position is that we must be able to staff our schools with an appropriate amount of

supervision for students. While we have experienced staffing shortages in key areas throughout the year, rising case rates translate into more cases among staff and more staff who must call out to take care of a sick or quarantining child. All of this exacerbates our staffing shortage, and could potentially result in the inability to run our schools. Fortunately, we have not reached this moment as of now, thanks in large part to the efforts of our existing staff to cover vacant positions on a daily basis.

However, given the current situation, I would like to make you aware of the following.

- First, we will begin to live stream the instruction taking place in each classroom. The live stream will take place via Google Meet and will be a one-way stream. The purpose of providing this access to the classroom is to encourage students who may be feeling ill—in addition to those who may be recovering from Covid or quarantining due to exposure—to have the ability to see and hear what is happening in the classroom. Please note that this is NOT long-term virtual instruction. Students staying home will be recorded as absent (unless they provide documentation of a positive Covid test) and will not be able to attend school-sponsored extracurricular activities. All classroom-based assessments or work will need to be made up in person upon the student's return to school. This change will take effect on Monday, December 20 and continue through at least January 7.
- Please do not send your child to school sick. We are experiencing an increase in the number of students who are coming to school symptomatic of illness and then must be sent home. We have also experienced instances of students being sent to school while awaiting the results of a Covid test, only to then find that they test positive, which of course leads to quarantines. Please do not send your child to school if they are symptomatic of illness.
- The volume of cases we are handling right now is overwhelming to our nursing staff, which consists of eight individuals. It is not possible for our school nurses to engage in parent contact and student contact tracing throughout the evening and overnight. If you send an email to a nurse (or teacher or principal) regarding the health status of your child after the school day, the school nurse will respond to it the following day.
- We are asking that all students bring home their Chromebooks every day moving forward. This way, if they need to stay home due to illness, they will have it with them.
- Finally, we continue to offer student testing at our middle school every Friday afternoon from 3:00 pm - 4:00 pm. Attached please find the parent form for testing if this is something you are interested in.

I am sorry to have to communicate a series of unpleasant messages in the midst of the holidays. We are continuing to do the best we can under the circumstances and we are committed to providing students with as much normality to their educational experience as is possible at the present time. Thank you for your ongoing understanding and flexibility.

Sincerely,

Michael LaSusa

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