

Office of the Superintendent
259 Lafayette Avenue, Chatham NJ 07928

Dr. Michael LaSusa
Superintendent of Schools

August 18, 2022

Dear Parent,

I hope this letter finds you and your children well and excited about embarking on another school year. By this point, you have received letters from your child's school about next week's start and other important items. Below are some district-wide points of interest as we begin the year.

Safety and Security

The safety, security, and wellbeing of all students and staff in our schools is the foremost priority of our district. I would like to call your attention to a few developments in this regard.

- We have been working through the summer with the Chatham Borough and Township Police Departments to secure Special Class Resource Officers for each of our schools. When schools open on the 25th, we will have three officers in district schools and we anticipate that number to expand in September. Securing officers depends entirely on the pool of potential candidates available to our local police chiefs, and then the approval process through the municipal governing bodies. These officers receive special training and are hired specifically to protect schools. They are not involved in student discipline or other student matters, but rather are present to build relationships and respond to any critical incident. We are grateful for their service and recognize them as valuable members of our school communities.
- A key ingredient in the prevention of school violence is the prompt report of suspicious or concerning activity. Morris County has established an anonymous tip line that all police departments monitor called [RSVP-3](#). You may download the app to your phone and use it to report a potential threat to the safety or welfare of students.
- The school district has also installed an alert system called *911 Inform*. Some of the features of this system include panic buttons within the offices of each school that alert police dispatch and trigger strobe lights to indicate an emergency; a geofence around all school properties that triggers alerts to police dispatch and school personnel any time 9-1-1 is dialed from any phone, including cell phones, on school property; geo-mapping of said calls so that the exact location of the call is known to first responders, and other features that would assist first responders in responding to an incident.
- Governor Murphy recently signed into law a requirement that districts create threat assessment teams. The NJDOE has informed us that the new law takes effect for the 2023/2024 school year. Members of both police departments and I have been trained in behavioral threat assessment and we have drawn on this training in the course of managing incidents of concern. We will continue to utilize best

practices in this area and will carefully look at the instructions and requirements put forth by the NJDOE and Attorney General's Office once they formulate and distribute them.

The August Start to School

Last year, the first day of school was August 30. This year it is August 25. Next year it will be August 28. We have transitioned to an earlier start for numerous reasons:

- The college admissions process has steadily moved forward in the school year. The CHS counseling office processed 1,260 "early decision/action" applications last fall, mostly by November 1. Providing more time for this process is helpful to staff and the students who are completing these applications as the culmination of their student experience in Chatham.
- The windows for standardized testing—from APs in May to the NJDOE Start Strong, which must be administered between August 31 and September 29—are established by outside entities and are fixed. The more time our teachers and students have working together before the tests, the better and less stressful it is for them.
- The NJSIAA has established the beginning of the fall athletic season this year as August 10. In fact, our first regular season football game will take place on Friday, August 26. We have over 400 student athletes, as well as dozens of Marching Band members, engaged in school activities between August 10 and August 25, the first day of school. This is almost 1/7 of our total student population, many of whom have siblings, who need to be back on campus during August.
- Ending the school year as close to Memorial Day weekend as possible is beneficial to students who must attend college orientations in June and is generally better for students overall.

Based on the above, it is likely that we will continue to open the school year during the final week of August. [Next year's calendar](#) is available on our website and the 2024/2025 calendar will likely be adopted in early 2023.

The Change in the Daily Start-Times of Schools

You may consult [this page](#) of our website to learn more about the changes to our daily school schedules. I will simply mention at present that any change may be beneficial to some, but carry disruption or inconvenience to others. We are making this change because we believe it is what is best for students. To help reduce the disruption to some, we have been working with Work-Family Connection to assist in staffing their programs to accommodate anyone on a waitlist and we have also been working closely with First Student on our bus routes so that they run as efficiently as possible. All bus route assignments are now posted in the Parent Portal. Should you have any questions about your child's stop or route, you may contact Sandra Myers at smyers@chatham-nj.org. We will continue to make adjustments as we experience the effects of the shift in schedules.

Delayed Openings

When there is the need to delay schools due to inclement weather or any other reason, we have historically used a 2-hour delay. We are moving away from that practice and instead plan to delay schools by 90 minutes. All announcements about a delay will reiterate the 90-minute timeframe.

Enrollment

In June, we celebrated the graduation of 329 CHS seniors. Next week, we will welcome 237 first graders who will replace them. In 2021, we graduated 361 and replaced them with 236 incoming students. This dynamic,

outlined in birth rate analyses from our [demographic study from 2018](#), is leading to declining overall enrollment in the district. We are in the process of completing an updated demographic report to analyze current trends post-pandemic and also the composite impact of new housing developments in the Borough and the Township. We hope to have this study completed and presented by December/January. We will also discuss enrollment trends and their impacts at upcoming Board of Education meetings this fall.

Curriculum

Curriculum documents for all courses in the district have been updated and may be found on [this page of our website](#). They include the standards covered, the resources used, the key goals and objectives of the course, and so forth. There are over 1,700 pages of curriculum available to review, including all of the curriculum for our health and physical education courses. You will receive additional information about health units touching on sexual health in the coming weeks. Specifically, Dr. Mary Donohue, our assistant superintendent for curriculum and instruction, will provide details about the grade levels in which those units occur, the time in the year when the lessons will be taught to students, presentations that parents can review before the lessons are taught, and the opt-out process for any parent who would prefer their child not be taught about sexual health at a particular grade level. Our goal in this deliberate communication is to be transparent and proactive with the material and its delivery.

Covid and Illness

We will make a few changes as we enter this year with regard to Covid-related processes.

- We will no longer maintain a dashboard of cases nor will we send notifications for every positive case we are made aware of. If there is a particular outbreak in a classroom, we will communicate that so that parents may monitor their children for illness.
- We will no longer provide virtual instruction for a student who tests positive and must isolate. While this may have been helpful to some, it diverts the attention a teacher has to devote to their class and adds one more distraction to the in-person classroom experience. If a child is ill, regardless of the illness, they should rest. Given that the isolation time for Covid has been reduced down to five days, which is half the length it was in the early days of the pandemic, students should rest at home and, if they feel up to it, follow along with assignments via Google Classroom until they return to class. In other words, they should do what they have always done.
- Governor Murphy has rescinded the testing requirement for unvaccinated staff, which means that parent volunteers will no longer need to show proof of vaccination or a negative test.
- Last spring, we were able to secure free Covid tests for student use. We have distributed these tests to our school nurses. If a student is ill at school and needs to be sent home, we will offer the parent the option of a free at-home test. We will not administer the test at school, but the parent may do so at home. This is a courtesy and we will offer these tests to parents while our supplies last.

The biggest ask we have of all parents continues to be to keep your child home from school if they are sick. Again, this helps all children and staff, regardless of the illness. I must relay that I have been in communication with the Department of Health this summer and they also ask that parents keep children home if they have an undiagnosed rash. They have advised us of an increase in cases of monkeypox in New Jersey and of reports of pediatric cases in other states. It is possible that there will be additional pediatric cases once schools open. We have discussed with the DOH the protocols we would follow if we have a case in the district, and we will promptly inform our school community if one should arise. But what we can all do now is keep our kids home

from school if they are not feeling well, whether because of a fever or a cough or an undiagnosed rash or some other ailment. We appreciate the collective effort to keep all students healthy and in school.

Assessments

As noted above, we are again required to administer something called Start Strong to students in most grade levels. We must complete this task by September 29, so your child's school will share details about this very early in the school year. The full [assessment calendar](#) for the year is available on our website.

We are eager to greet your child on August 25 and kick off the 2022/2023 school year. Thank you for all of your support of our schools and I wish your child and your family a rewarding and enjoyable year.

Sincerely,

Michael LaSusa

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