



Borough of Freehold Public Schools

280 Park Avenue
Freehold, New Jersey 07728
(732) 761-2100 - FAX (732) 462-8954

Paul Jensen
Board President

Rocco G. Tomazic, Ed.D
Superintendent

November 30, 2020

Re: Notification of Full Virtual Learning in the Freehold Borough Public Schools

Dear Parents/Guardians

Summary: This letter announces Freehold Borough's return to full virtual learning. This decision is based on the current COVID-19 level of community spread in Freehold Borough, the guidelines of the New Jersey Department of Health, and the recommendation of the Freehold Health Officer. The district will remain on full virtual learning until the public health situation abates and allows for a safe return to in-school hybrid learning.

Background: Monmouth County and Freehold Borough were placed in High Risk (Orange) on Thursday, November 19, 2020 and remain so as of this date. Previously Monmouth County and Freehold Borough had been designated at Moderate Risk (Yellow), this since the beginning of the school year in September 2020. In accordance with the New Jersey Department of Health document entitled *COVID-19 Public Health Recommendations for Local Health Departments for K-12 Schools* (issued 9/8/20 and updated 11/19/20), when the COVID-19 Regional Risk Matrix shifts to High Risk (Orange), school districts under that designation should consider implementing fully virtual learning.

Action: All Freehold Borough Schools will now move to full virtual learning. Students currently on virtual learning will remain so and will not return to in-person hybrid instruction on December 14, 2020 as previously planned. The five Special Education classes at Freehold Learning Center currently doing in-person hybrid learning will shift back to full virtual learning on Thursday, December 3, 2020. The entire district will remain on full virtual learning following their normal full-day schedule comprising 100% synchronous instruction. The district will remain fully virtual until such time that Monmouth County and Freehold Borough reliably return to Moderate Risk (Yellow) and an updated transition plan for in-person hybrid instruction can be implemented. The district will give at least a three-week notice of any planned return to in-school hybrid learning. The district will be constantly monitoring public health conditions, but in all cases will thoroughly review the district status on January 29, 2021, the end of Marking Period #2.

Associated Issues: When districts are under High Risk (Orange), the criteria to require an individual, student or staff, to go into a 14-day quarantine period expands. Those having close contact with a COVID positive case, meaning less than 6ft for more than 15 minutes over a 24-hour period, must currently quarantine for 14 days. Additionally, under High Risk (Orange),



Borough of Freehold Public Schools

280 Park Avenue
Freehold, New Jersey 07728
(732) 761-2100 - FAX (732) 462-8954

Paul Jensen
Board President

Rocco G. Tomazic, Ed.D
Superintendent

individuals must also be placed in 14-day quarantine if they are a close contact to an individual who has symptoms associated with COVID-19, even though a positive test result is not available. This expanded criterion will greatly increase the number of students and staff in quarantine, bringing into question how long the district can properly operate in-school learning.

Instructional Model: All public school districts in New Jersey are required to carry out some form of in-school hybrid learning, unless they have a health and safety reason which prevents opening. In Freehold Borough, we have had to delay our in-school hybrid instruction until resolving a number of health and safety issues, most significantly our air purification. During this time we made a purposeful decision to carry out full virtual learning for the entire school day doing 100% synchronous instruction until such time that we could return to in-school hybrid instruction.

In-School Hybrid Instruction: Per our district Restart and Reentry Plan, we were going to start our in-school hybrid instruction at Level 4, using a 50%, half day model. Those students desiring in-school hybrid (currently 63%) would attend school for half days on alternating days for their core subjects (English Language Arts, Math, Science, Social Studies). 50% of the time would be in class, 50% of the time would be asynchronous work. For those students choosing to remain fully virtual (currently 37%), they would have the same mix of time, except that when the hybrid students were in school, the virtual students would be online in synchronous instruction. All students, whether in-school hybrid or fully virtual, would do their related courses (e.g. Health, PE, Art, Music, Technology, Spanish) fully virtual.

Scheduling Considerations: With our designation as High Risk (Orange) and the strong recommendation from health officials that we shift to full virtual learning, the district has the advantage that we can continue largely uninterrupted in our full day virtual program, 100% synchronous for 100% of the time for all subjects. Students will be able to keep their same teachers and have a degree of consistency until the worst of the current public health crisis passes. In order to start full in-school hybrid learning, some students who had switched their preferences since August were going to have to change their teachers. Also, those students on full virtual were going to get less synchronous time in their core courses than they are at present. Once we shift to in-school hybrid learning, if we then have an outbreak in school, we might be faced with the requirement to close for short periods. The New Jersey Department of Health guidance states that when there is a significant community outbreak that is impacting multiple staff and students, the district should consider closing school for 14-days. This possibly sets up the district for a disruptive yo-yo pattern of back and forth, being in school or virtual on an irregular basis. We have seen this occurring in other districts that have been in in-school



Borough of Freehold Public Schools

280 Park Avenue
Freehold, New Jersey 07728
(732) 761-2100 - FAX (732) 462-8954

Paul Jensen
Board President

Rocco G. Tomazic, Ed.D
Superintendent

hybrid, which has only gotten worse as the community spread has increased. The advantages of being in-school hybrid only accrue if one can stay in school. The current public health environment does not support such stability. Since we are in High Risk Orange, it is better that all our students remain attending school on a virtual basis, for the full day, synchronous with the teachers they have been working with since the beginning of the year.

Food Distribution: The district continues with its commitment to provide breakfast and lunch to students regardless of how we are conducting school. Starting Wednesday December 2, 2020, the district will be distributing free breakfast and lunch at two locations. We will continue to distribute free breakfast and lunches in the rear of the Park Ave Complex at Door #15 from 8am-12noon, Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. Starting this Wednesday and moving forward, we will also distribute breakfast/lunches from the rear area of the Freehold Library, accessible through the Market Yard Parking Lot. We are opening this second location in anticipation of the day when we reopen for in-school hybrid instruction. When we do, all virtual students will pick up their food at the Freehold Library. The students in school will eat their breakfast before school and get their lunch grab and go as they leave. Until we do reopen in-school hybrid instruction we will run both locations.

Building Readiness: We have made extensive preparations to ensure our schools are safe to operate. This has included installation of bipolar ionizers for air filtration, thermal imagers to detect fever, plastic barriers for social distancing, health questionnaires to assist families screening students at home, and procedures in the schools to minimize risk and maintain social distance parameters (e.g. signage, hand washing, face coverings, disinfecting, etc.) We are fully compliant with all guidelines. But our preparations cannot compensate for a full-scale community outbreak as we are presently experiencing. But know that our buildings are ready to go, once the present community outbreak subsides.

Way Forward: At such point that our COVID-19 community spread starts to decrease, and Freehold Borough again returns to Moderate Risk (Yellow) on the COVID-19 Regional Matrix, the district will again proceed with planning to transition to in-person hybrid learning, as it is required to do. Our current student schedules are constructed on the parent choices given us in mid-August. At that time 69% wanted hybrid and 31% wanted to remain full virtual. In our recent survey sentiments had shifted and we are currently 63% wanting hybrid and 37% wanting to remain full virtual. These shifts have caused scheduling difficulties and the Principals are in the process of making schedule adjustments and advising parents who shifted if they need a teacher change. We will not change any schedules until we are headed back to in-school hybrid instruction. When we go forward with the new plan to transition back to hybrid at Level 4, we will not resurvey parents on their scheduling preferences (in-school or



Borough of Freehold Public Schools

280 Park Avenue
Freehold, New Jersey 07728
(732) 761-2100 - FAX (732) 462-8954

Paul Jensen
Board President

Rocco G. Tomazic, Ed.D.
Superintendent

virtual). We will use the data that is currently in the system and issue the schedules accordingly. Any parent who between now and then changes their mind needs to immediately inform the school as the change of preference occurs. If you are uncertain whether your student is currently scheduled for hybrid or full virtual, you can look in the Genesis Parent Portal where it is clearly indicated. Feel free to call the school if you have any questions about registering your instructional preference.

Conclusion: While I am certain that shifting to full virtual is the right thing to do at this point in time, I do fully understand how disappointed many of our students will be who had hoped to soon be back in school. I am equally aware of how disruptive this is to some of our parents as they must continue to juggle schedules and childcare arrangements. We have worked extremely hard to get the district to a position that it can safely open for in-school hybrid instruction. But the realities of the current situation and strong recommendations of our health officials make shifting to in-school hybrid currently inadvisable. We will delay our transition until we can reopen safely and with some expectation that we can stay open.

Thank you for your flexibility, understanding and support.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Rocco G. Tomazic".

Rocco G. Tomazic, Ed.D.
Superintendent