

Dear Merrimack Families and District Staff~

This has been a very important week for all of us. No one living now has been through anything like this before. All of us hope we never have to experience anything like this again. While there may be disagreement about a lot, on this point I'm sure we can all agree.

On Monday night District administration presented its school reopening plan to the Merrimack School Board. At that meeting we tried to provide as many details as we could about why we chose a hybrid model for school reopening. Additionally, at that meeting we tried to provide as many details as we could about the safety protocols that will be in place for a partial return to school. Finally, at that meeting, we tried to provide as many details as we could about the instructional plan for on location and remote learning. These details are all to be found on the Merrimack School District website at [www.sau26.org](http://www.sau26.org)

At Monday's school board meeting we also tried to explain that there are many additional details that need to be addressed relative to school reopening that pertain to students, their families and our staff. The fact, as true now as it was Monday night, is that we need time to make the best decisions we can in light of the goal we are trying to achieve; a phased in return to school, after a crisis like none other in our lifetimes, under conditions as safe as we can make them for our students and our staff. That's the goal-but achieving that goal is far more complicated than it sounds, and many details do not lend themselves to quick or easy answers. We will get there for sure-but in many instances not as quickly as we, or our community, would like. In that sense, we are all in the same boat. We are trying to provide as much clarity as possible about what a return to school will look like when that return to school is just under two months away. Things have been known to change by the hour in this situation-what will happen in two months' time is anyone's guess. But we are planning now as best we can, just like our students, their families, and our staff.

But in spite of all the uncertainty, there is much that we do know. Here is a quick and partial review of what is currently known and planned (**for a complete review, please go to the District website**):

1. The District will offer families two options for school in the fall:
  - a. Hybrid (2 days of on location learning, 2 days of remote learning, and one flex day)
  - b. Full time remote learning, with one flex day
  - c. This plan will be in effect through October 30<sup>th</sup> and modified, as necessary, at any point as condition dictate
2. School will start for students on September 9
3. This year, we will count instructional hours rather than calendar days
4. Friday of each week will be a FLEX day at least through October 30<sup>th</sup>. Work remains on determining the best use of FLEX day

5. On every day of on location schooling, as a result of the hybrid model, each school will operate with **half that school's full enrollment**. To be specific, based on **projected enrollments for the 2020-2021 school year**, here's what that will mean:

School	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
<b>MHS</b>	Max # of students=632 (Group A)	Max # of students=632 (Group A)	Max # of students=632 (Group B)	Max # of students=632 (Group B)	Flex day (TBD)
<b>MMS</b>	Max # of students=281 (Group A)	Max # of students=281 (Group A)	Max # of students=281 (Group B)	Max # of students=281 (Group B)	Flex day (TBD)
<b>MUES</b>	Max # of students=292 (Group A)	Max # of students=292 (Group A)	Max # of students=292 (Group B)	Max # of students=292 (Group B)	Flex day (TBD)
<b>MES</b>	Max # of students=224 (Group A)	Max # of students=224 (Group A)	Max # of students=224 (Group B)	Max # of students=224 (Group B)	Flex day (TBD)
<b>TFS</b>	Max # of students=300 (Group A)	Max # of students=300 (Group A)	Max # of students=300 (Group B)	Max # of students=300 (Group B)	Flex day (TBD)
<b>RFS</b>	Max # of students=257 (Group A)	Max # of students=257 (Group A)	Max # of students=257 (Group B)	Max # of students=257 (Group B)	Flex day (TBD)

One important goal we will achieve with the selection of the hybrid model is **social distancing**. Each school is built for double the number of students that will be attending each day of the week during the period of the hybrid model. At a minimum, this means that:

- Classroom populations of students will be significantly decreased each day of on location learning
- Recess populations of students will be significantly decreased each day of on location learning
- Bus populations of students will be significantly decreased each day of on location learning

In all these settings, it will be significantly easier to enforce and maintain social distancing because each school will receive half the number of total students on any given day, thereby increasing the ability of staff to manage and achieve the goal of social distancing. It is important to remember that in all likelihood these daily student totals for on location learning will even be somewhat lower than projected based on the number of students who elect full time remote learning

6. Students using bus transportation to and from school will be required to seat one student per seat on the bus
7. Each bus will be disinfected between the first and second runs of each day, both in the morning and in the afternoon
8. Bus drivers will wear face masks or face shields each bus run
9. Portable hand sanitizing stations will be placed throughout each school building, along with plexiglass dividers in common areas, like the main office, nurse's office etc.

10. Portable hand washing stations will be deployed throughout each building to increase the opportunity of students and staff to maintain clean hands throughout the school day
11. Electrostatic disinfectants will be used each night in each school to disinfect all surfaces throughout the school buildings
12. Masks
  - a. **All students are strongly encouraged to wear masks while in school. Merrimack families are asked to support this goal by encouraging their students to wear masks while in school.** Additional guidance will be provided shortly about expectations with regard to the use of masks by students throughout the school day, including when/where it may be appropriate to remove them. Please see my letter of July 15 for a more detailed explanation with regard to masks.
  - b. Relative to the use of masks by staff, I stated in the July 15<sup>th</sup> letter, and reaffirm tonight, the following: **Expectations for school staff relative to the use of masks will be developed and released within the next few weeks but will include, at a minimum, an equally strong recommendation for the use of masks.** Please note the phrase “at a minimum.” It is important. Additional requirements may emerge over the coming weeks. This is one of the many details related to school reopening that must be further discussed so that our ultimate position is clear and well-reasoned.

In the end, we all want the same thing for our students and staff—a safe return to school to achieve our mission of education. The schools are doing all they can to achieve the goal of a safe return to our mission and I once again urge our parent and staff community to share in that effort by supporting the use of masks, whether mandated or not. In addition to social distancing and handwashing, the use of masks is one of the few things we have direct control over that is confirmed by fact and science to mitigate the risk of viral transmission. This is a matter upon which I hope and expect we can find common ground for the good of those we serve and of those we employ.

13. The District will adopt a consistent electronic platform for instruction that will be used both in school and remotely to assist in the consistency of instruction and assessment
14. Schedules are currently being developed to increase sustained time for learning and allowing for time for remediation and social emotional wellbeing
15. To assist in the goal of providing clear and manageable expectations for student learning, each grade level is in the process of developing between 5 and 8 essential reporting standards for each semester across all content areas
16. To assist in the improvement of remote learning, the District will develop a scope and sequence for all grade levels and courses that has clarity with assignments and due dates and clear expectations for on location and remote learning
17. Since this is a very dynamic situation, we will all need to be as flexible and understanding with each other as circumstances change. Therefore, if a family elects one option for return to school and finds its circumstances significantly changed by events and requires a different option later, the District will do all it can to accommodate those changing circumstances. This applies to staff as well. But I must be clear on this point: The ability of the District to accommodate the variety of needs posed by families and staff must be counterbalanced by the limits of what the District can reasonably achieve and deliver. That is a different way of saying that while the District will do all it can to accommodate the needs of its families and

staff we hope and expect that families and staff will recognize and support the District in its efforts to develop a workable plan to achieve its essential mission of education in the context of safety.

This list is partial. There is far more detail to be found on our District website to learn more about all the details relative to school reopening that the District has actually already worked out and begun implementing. Clearly, there is much more to work through, and much more to communicate. In the coming days, we will add a **Frequently Asked Questions** page to our District website that will provide updated information as it is developed that will, in a likelihood, continue to address the many questions that so many of you, and quite reasonably so, have. We are moving as quickly as we can to add details to the plan shared with our Board on Monday night and we will continue to do our best to provide timely updates to that plan as work on it continues throughout the summer.

These are challenging days for sure. But your schools, and all its employees, are up to the challenge. We thank you for your patience as we work to provide the best services we can during this on-going test.

Stay well.

Mark McLaughlin  
Superintendent