

Dear Merrimack Families and District Staff~

I am writing tonight to provide you all with a summary of some of the important issues presented, discussed, and decided at Wednesday night's special school board meeting. The common thread in all of it-the District is moving ahead on all fronts to be ready for our fall reopening. What follows is information intended to add to the emerging picture of that very exciting event.

For more detailed information please go to the Merrimack to District website at www.sau26.org to review all the updates presented at Wednesday night's school board meeting.

Merrimack High School Reopening Plans—Path to Graduation

Principal Putney and Assistant Principals Bergeron and Zampieri provided information specifically related to Merrimack High School's reopening plans. This information included:

- Plans to connect all learners, hybrid and fully remote, with the Merrimack High School community to ensure to ensure a sense of connection and value
- The ongoing development of student and teacher schedules
- Hybrid and remote grading practices and expectations
- Description and explanation of the developing “guaranteed curriculum”
- Expectations of, and provisions for, health and safety practices for hybrid learners
- A summary of items requiring additional time and consideration-among them
 - Parking
 - Student ID's
 - Lunches
 - CTE Programs

Mrs. Putney, Mr. Bergeron and Mr. Zampieri reiterated their focus on creating the conditions for Merrimack High School to be every student's “true north” no matter where their learning happens and that all paths taken by a student during this strange time will lead to graduation!

Fall Sports

Athletic Director Mike Soucy presented the District's plan for fall sports in the context of the on-going state health emergency. Specifically, he provided the board with the District's recommendations for supporting the following sports:

- Cross Country
- Field Hockey
- Golf
- Soccer
- Spirit (Cheerleading)
- Volleyball

He reasserted our District's strong support for its sports programs and the specific conditions under which our athletes would be permitted to practice and to play competitively. He explained the relative risks associated with each sport and the virus mitigation protocols that would be in place for each sport, the manner in which schedules would be developed and implemented, and he described the connection between our District's decision to offer these sports and the decisions made, and yet to be made, by other Division I school districts before competition can even be possible.

Athletic Director Soucy also shared his, and the District's, recommendation **not** to offer football this fall based on the significant challenges presented, by the nature of that sport, to reliable and sustainable virus mitigation efforts. He shared the disappointment we feel for our football team

and felt by all of us every day as we continue to deal with the effects of a pandemic all of us reasonably would have hoped and expected by now would no longer need to be a part of our lives or a factor in any of our decisions.

The Board voted to approve the proposed recommendation for the sports listed above. They will continue to evaluate the recommendation for football and reconsider their position at an upcoming special board meeting.

Student Services/Special Education

Student Services Director Heather Barker and her team have worked exhaustively to ensure that all executive orders related to special education during the ongoing COVID-19 crisis are understood and adhered to by staff, students and their families. She reiterated, as she has done throughout the summer, that the effective delivery of services to students on IEPs will be best and most effectively achieved through an active and ongoing collaboration between educators, their students and families. Additionally, Mrs. Barker provided updated information concerning

- the establishment of cohort groups and student schedules
- upcoming opportunities for families and students to connect with special education teams
- (MEEP) the pre-school program
- names of special education contacts at each school
- ways to connect with special education administrators and families for ZOOM coffee and conversation opportunities

Curriculum and Instruction

Assistant Superintendent Fabrizio provided updated information about the massive work done by teachers and administrators to develop Essential Learning Competencies (ELCs) designed to provide clarity around curricular expectations to students during their hybrid and remote learning experiences. Additionally, he provided information related to how those competencies may be accessed, understood and utilized by students and teachers to aid in instruction. This work is only the most recent part of the much larger focus of activity engaged in all summer to prepare a curriculum and instruction plan for school in the midst of the limitations imposed on all of us by the ongoing health emergency

Safety

Assistant Superintendent Shevenell provided updated information about the wide variety of health and safety equipment that has been arriving daily in our District and deployed by our custodial staff throughout our schools in support of our virus mitigation and safety goals. With foresight and good planning, Assistant Superintendent Shevenell has secured equipment that has been sought by school districts across the country, many of which are still waiting for deliveries that we have already deployed.

Policy

The Merrimack School Board approved a policy concerning the use of masks by students and staff on school and school district property. The specific policy will be posted to the District website, and all school websites, by early next week. However, for your information tonight, please understand these basic principles of the newly adopted policy:

- The policy requires all students and all school and school district employees, contractors and vendors (PreK-Grade 12) to wear masks at all times during the school day
- The policy requires students to wear masks at all times on district provided transportation
- The policy allows designated mask breaks (at specific times only when social distancing is possible)
- The policy allows for exceptions in cases of a diagnosed and medically documented disability

Wednesday night the Merrimack School Board also reviewed the following three policies:

- Non-Discrimination, Equal Opportunity Employment and District Anti-Discrimination Plan Policy
- Communicable and Infectious Diseases Policy
- Temporary Emergency Policy: Travel Guidance for Students and Staff

These three policies will be further reviewed at the next two school board meetings, at which time action may be taken on some or all of them.

For obvious reasons this has been a very non-traditional summer. For school and District employees (administrators, educators, staff) the chief difference between the school year from March through May and the summer from June through the present day is the time of year for which we are planning. Hope of the virus abating to the point where the governor would rescind his emergency order has been replaced by our resolve to do all we can to provide our students and their families with

- options that best fit their needs
- safe and sustainable conditions to engage in limited on-location learning and teaching,
- a curriculum and instruction plan that ensures all students receive the quality education they deserve.

And all of this has taken place in the context of complex federal laws and regulations stipulating the accommodations that schools and school districts must provide to their students and employees, a responsibility the Merrimack School District has undertaken with the utmost seriousness. Literally thousands of hours, collectively, have been spent by administrators, staff, educators and others to create the system which will be in place to support student learning this fall.

In the best of times, whether acknowledged or not, our teachers and all our staff form the backbone of what makes this, or any community, strong and healthy. In truly challenging times, like those we have been living in for nearly six months, our teachers and all our staff have become even more than the backbone of our community—they have become the symbol of stability, consistency, normalcy and comfort in the midst of pervasive uncertainty. Their dedication to the children of this community is unrivaled and with every meeting, with every late night, and with every planning session, the teachers and staff of this district prove and reprove that dedication. I am sure that we can all agree that they deserve our deepest thanks for the care they have shown, and will soon show again, to the youth of this community.

Stay well.

Mark McLaughlin
Superintendent

