Dear Merrimack Families and District Staff~

As this week winds down, I am writing with an important update concerning school reopening, which is now just a few days away for teachers and staff and less than two weeks away for students. We continue to work every day on safety, curriculum and instruction, scheduling, transportation and a host of other details that go into opening school under emergency conditions, which are still in effect in the state of New Hampshire. Next week, we will begin a periodic series of updates related to additional school reopening details. The goal of these updates is to provide our students and their families with increasing clarity about what to expect as school reopens for all students and staff, whether they are participating in our hybrid model or our fully remote model. What follows is updated information that is particularly time sensitive.

Moratorium on Switching Options

As of this writing, the District will no longer be able to accept any changes to selections relative to either the Hybrid or Remote option from families in **grades PreK-8**. Given additional information recently shared with high school students and their families, the District **will extend the deadline for option changes to Monday, August 31st at 5 PM for students in grades 9-12.**

The District provided two opportunities for families to declare their preferences, one in mid-July and the other in early August, at which time we indicated that, for scheduling purposes, we must close the window for changing from one selected option to another in order for schools to continue with their reopening plans based on reliable information. Since that time, each of our schools have continued to receive many multiple requests from families to shift options, which we have accommodated in the spirit of supporting our community in a very challenging time. However, as previously indicated, each school relies upon confirmed option information from each family in order to build student and teacher schedules, to assign students to teachers in either hybrid or remote classes, and to develop a transportation schedule among many other things. Each change, from hybrid to remote or vice versa requires a substantial recalibration of the delicate and carefully formulated schedules that we are trying to build.

Let me be clear. We recognize that these decisions are hard. We also recognize that as additional information has been shared with the community over the course of the summer related to school reopening, whether related to the wearing of masks or additional course opportunities available to high school students, the basis upon which initial decisions were made have shifted and caused our families to consider different options and reconsider choices. As a result, we have worked hard to flexibly

accommodate family choices and multiple preference switches throughout this period of developing plans. However, we have now reached the point in the calendar where, in order to stay on schedule for school reopening, we can no longer entertain shifts in previously selected options.

I wish to be clear on another point. It has often been asked by families and students if, given evolving circumstances, the District could entertain the wishes of families who wish to change their minds from one option to another after an initial choice has been made. The answer then, as now, is yes. However, initial schedules must now be built and can only be built on solid, reliable and unchanging family choice data. That is why, for the time being, we must issue this moratorium on additional changes to previously confirmed choices. Once the school year has begun we will, as we have always indicated, work with our families to accommodate changing circumstances. In return, we ask our families to recognize the complexity of building a school schedule with so many variables and to be patient with our school teams as they work first to create an accommodating schedule and then, later, to adjust to evolving requests.

Thank you and stay well.

Mark McLaughlin
Superintendent