

Dear Merrimack Families and District Staff~

I write this at the beginning of the 9<sup>th</sup> day of our school reopening process. I've had the genuine pleasure of seeing many students back in their schools and in their classrooms over the last days and it has been a privilege to see them back again. I have not yet had the opportunity to "drop in" on some of our remote students and their teachers, although I hope to do so this week. In every case, whether students are participating in the hybrid or remote option, our students have returned to school, and we welcome them all.

I am very appreciative of our families for partnering so genuinely with us throughout our return to school and for the patience and understanding they have shown in the early days of this school year. As we've said on so many occasions before, this is a community problem and will only be solved by community partnerships. Evidence of that partnership can be found in many places and in many scenarios but none more important than in the care all are taking to avoid virus transmission.

The single most important factor in our ability to safely conduct school operations during this on-going pandemic is the cooperation of all students, families and staff in adhering to our safety protocols and in carefully following guidelines from your schools, the school district, and health officials, particularly those at the New Hampshire Department of Health and Human Services (NH DHHS). While each day brings the possibility of new challenges and changing circumstances that could adversely impact our school operations, to this point the Merrimack School District has avoided the challenge faced by other school districts in the state, some of whom have already experienced impacts brought about by the virus. This can certainly be attributed, at least in part, to the care taken by our student, parent and staff community to responsibly respond to the challenges posed by the virus in the context of school reopening. At the moment there is no single greater contribution you all can make to the ability of our schools to maintain operations during this never ending virus outbreak. For our part, the District continues to maintain and refine its school safety protocols to ensure as safe and clean a school and classroom environment as we can. For now, this is the best and most productive kind of school/community partnership I can think of and I am very thankful to everyone working together to support our mission of educating your students in the midst of daily challenges like we have not seen in recent history.

We continually review reports about COVID cases in the state of New Hampshire and locally, and are in almost daily contact with NH DHHS and other agencies to monitor daily fluctuations and trends in transmission. In the meantime, we are carefully working to prepare for whatever challenges might come our way relative to the virus and its impacts on our schools. Since the pandemic first hit us all so hard last march, the District has learned, as the saying goes, to "hope for the best and prepare for the worst." That is what we are doing every day to ensure the safety of our students and staff so that we remain able to deliver the best education we can to ALL our students, in whatever environment their learning is occurring.

Thank you again for your partnership as we face this challenge together as a community.

Mark McLaughlin

Superintendent