

August 26, 2020

Voorhees School Community,

I sincerely hope that you have made time for your family and friends this summer. Although the pandemic continues to present all of us with the challenges of adjusting to new norms and routines, it is important that we do not forget to make time to laugh, connect, and simply love those who are most important to us.

Important Calendar Adjustment

In reflecting on the board of education meeting last night and requests for additional time in the beginning of the year, I would like to make a small change to our school calendar. We currently have two staff in-service days scheduled February 12th and March 22nd. We are moving the two staff in-service days (2/12/22 & 3/22/21) to September 8th and 9th. During these staff only in-service days, we will distribute iPads to our students while simultaneously providing additional training time for staff. On September 10th and 11th will operate on a full remote early dismissal day for all students. This will test our systems and make sure all of our students are able to connect. Teachers will use the two remote learning days to introduce themselves to their students. We will begin the first day of the early dismissal schedule hybrid/remote learning on September 14th. [District Calendar](#)

Our Preparation

As we begin the new school year, I want to assure you that we are prepared to safely welcome our students and staff back. The single focus since the Road Back Guidance was released by the NJ Department of Education on June 26th, 2020 has been on implementing safety measures and procedures that will mitigate the risk of exposure to Covid-19. The approach that the district is taking is to layer multiple mitigation tools and strategies to increase our protection. The reduction of the number of students attending school into small cohorts is one example. Additionally, the use of various PPE and sanitation protocols are key to mitigating risk. I am pleased to share that we have ordered and received the staff requested PPE. Here are just some examples: 750 Face Shields (adult), 5,000 Face Coverings (adult-disposable/3-ply), 500 Isolation Gowns (Level 2), Child Face Shields (students), 5,000 Face Coverings (child-disposable/3-ply), 1,500 student desk shields, 50 transparent face shields, 1,000 Adult Face Coverings (adult washable), 600 hand sanitizer (for staff desks), and 600 disinfectant wipes (for staff desks). In addition, we also have new signage to support social distancing practices as well as good hygiene to support the new procedures and expectations throughout each school. Throughout each school, the hallway floors have been marked to indicate safe distancing that will help assist when students need to travel within the schools. For a full list of the supplies and equipment ordered in order to support our return please see the [Facilities](#) section of the district webpage.

Additional safeguards have also been purchased for our HVAC system this school year. In addition to routine and regular preventative maintenance, such as changing filters often, we are going above the requirements outlined in the NJDOE Road Back for ventilation. For our interior classrooms (classrooms without a window), Ultraviolet equipment in the HVAC units will provide additional sanitation to the forced air exiting the system. This equipment is safe and has been used for many years in hospitals, malls, and other public places that we routinely travel. For the latest IAQ, indoor air quality samples, please see the [Facilities](#) section of the district webpage.

The district will also use ultraviolet equipment designed for sanitizing surfaces as an additional safeguard. This equipment will be used when the buildings are not occupied and has also been proven safe for use in hospitals. Our custodial crews will continue to diligently adhere to their assigned cleaning responsibilities. Including, but not limited to, routinely cleaning the bathrooms, hallways, common areas, and classrooms. The use of thermal imaging cameras/scanners as well as handheld touchless thermometers will assist in daily symptom screenings for students and staff. We have touchless faucets and automatic toilet flushing equipment in student bathrooms as an additional precaution.

Most importantly, we are counting on our staff and students to always practice safe habits and routines. We all must wear our face coverings and other appropriate PPE with fidelity. In order for the safeguards to work, we cannot let our guard down at any point. We must practice frequent handwashing, wear face coverings properly, and adhere to social distancing whenever possible. The students will adjust to the new routines and expectations if we present the example. Please assist us in safeguarding our learning community by reinforcing the importance of the safe habits and routines at home with your children.

The beginning of the school year will include following our early dismissal schedule. This year the teachers are being asked to adapt their instructional pedagogy to reach both students in-person and remote. They must straddle the demands of in-person teaching and remote teaching. In order to do both jobs well, additional time is needed for teachers to prepare quality lessons to reach all students. Our early dismissal schedule will provide this additional time for teachers to receive professional development on best practices for hybrid learning. Staff will have time to reflect, review, and revise both instruction and building safety procedures. An early dismissal schedule will also allow teachers to touch base and offer support to students on their non-attending day. The early dismissal schedule is a temporary measure that will also give our students time to adjust to the new routines and expectations.

Voorhees Township School District is truly an amazing learning community. Despite the ups and downs of navigating through a pandemic, I am confident that we will come together in order to provide an exceptional learning experience for our students. It is time to do what we do best and showcase our talents. I want to thank all of you for being an active partner throughout the creation of the Voorhees Restart Plan.

I wish everyone a safe, healthy, and amazing school year!

Sincerely,

Dr. Gentile

**** Agenda item from last night's board meeting: XIV. Personnel: Item 1. Regarding background checks for employees.***

To clarify, the Voorhees Township School District does not have or intend to have any employees who have not been fully cleared and vetted through a thorough background check.

The inclusion of this language on the Agenda pre-dates my employment in the District. I am having the language removed from the Agenda in the future as it is only used in an extreme emergency situation. If the District has such a situation, then the language will be placed on the Agenda and attached to a specific employee.