

**July 31, 2020**

Dear Parents / Guardians, Students, and Community Members,

I hope this correspondence finds you and your family well. I am writing to follow up on my letter to the community from July 15 ([bit.ly/3j8ivQw](https://bit.ly/3j8ivQw)) and to share a few updates on our Reopening efforts.

As we continue to work on finalizing our district's Reopening Plan, please know that we are committed to adhering to behaviors that prevent the spread of COVID-19. Our goal is for all students to be in school as much as possible while preserving the safety of all students and staff in the school environment. However, our plans are guided by the provisions of the New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) which reflect recommendations of the New Jersey Department of Health (NJDOH) and are informed by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) guidance. To note, cloth face coverings for students and staff will be an important part of our plan as well as six-foot social distancing, hand hygiene, and regular cleaning and disinfecting of buildings and classrooms.

Also, creating a plan for a situation that may shift is very challenging. Therefore, in order to best prepare the community for what the future may hold, the final Reopening Plan that we share with the community will be fluid and will change as necessary based on guidance from the state, CDC and considerations to our students, staff, families and community. We obviously don't want to have a COVID-19 case at one of our schools in the fall but it is a possibility, and we will be ready to react if and when it happens.


In this correspondence, I will:

- Provide updates on the work that the Reopening Taskforce has been engaged in;
- Provide updates on the instructional model options that we will be providing to families;
- Share information on a "Return to School Preference" form which will be sent to families early next week;
- Share information on the new learning management system, Canvas that will be used starting in fall 2020 to support all virtual instruction;
- Share the important "Back to School Preparation Checklist" for families.

These continue to be very challenging and unpredictable times, but we will get through this together! Thank you for your partnership and we will be sending more detailed information on our scheduling framework in addition to our district's Reopening Plan shortly.

Please feel free to email any feedback or concerns to: [info@somds.k12.nj.us](mailto:info@somds.k12.nj.us).

Educationally Yours,



Dr. Ronald G. Taylor  
Superintendent of Schools

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## ***Reopening Taskforce Updates:***

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As shared in our July 15 communication, to engage multiple voices and perspectives in our planning process, we established the SOMSD Rethink-Reopen Taskforce to weigh state recommendations, identify reopening strategies across the world, identify community concerns and needs, and to make realistic recommendations for reopening. The Taskforce is composed of 14 sub-committees and consists of over 100 members of our District community. The District continues to monitor updates from the NJ Department of Education as information is released and as we get closer to school reopening. Below are key updates:

- The District is in compliance with the NJ Department of Education (NJDOE) timeline for local Reopen Plan completion (one-month before schools reopen);
- The Taskforce continues to meet Tuesday's and Thursday's with a final review of the draft plan set for Tuesday, August 4;
- The return models being recommended will address students' developmental and learning needs;
- The District has purchased a new virtual learning platform (more information is below) and the first stage of training on this platform is scheduled for next week.;
- Each district school has established a pandemic response team to monitor implementation of the district's Reopen Plan;
- Dr. Taylor continues to obtain feedback on plan specifics from key stakeholder groups among them:
  - Multiple virtual meetings have been held with the BOE members to review and discuss the draft Reopening Plan
  - Parental Voices: The first parent panel focus group with the Superintendent and Parenting Center was held on 7/29 with parents/guardians and key learnings and insights were brought back to the Taskforce; a follow-up meeting will be held on August 5; multiple meetings have also been held with the President's Councils and PTA, as well as other stakeholder groups in the past two weeks to hear concerns and address questions that parents have.
  - The return to school survey for families was sent out to all District families on July 7, 2020; 5,454 responses were collected between July 7 - 24.
  - Student Voices: The return to school survey for students was sent to all CHS students and middle school students and their parents/guardians on July 16; 1,496 responses were collected between July 16 - 24.
- A more user-friendly School Reopening and COVID-19 Information microsite is being developed to help families/staff/students find information more easily and will be launched when the Reopening Plan is shared with the community.

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## ***Instructional Learning Options:***

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First, we know that school will look different and many families are apprehensive about sending their children back to school during this pandemic. Knowing this, we will be offering options for instruction for all students.

As per the recent state guidelines, we are providing two instruction options for families. Parents will have the option of choosing between an all-virtual or hybrid instruction for their child(ren). Special Services instruction summary is also provided.

<b>Virtual Instruction</b> <i>(online/remote)</i>	Selecting this option means your child will learn at home. Virtual instruction will be provided online via the District’s new learning management system, ‘Canvas.’ Students will be provided virtual lessons with teachers and classmates, as well as self-paced activities, projects, and assignments. Daily attendance will be taken and students will have a full course-load of instruction. Teachers will use Canvas to provide distance learning for students.
<b>Hybrid Instruction</b> <i>(combination in-person and online)</i>	Selecting this option means your child will attend school in person two* days per week on an alternating schedule and will learn from home virtually using Canvas during the remainder of the week. This will allow for much smaller class sizes to meet the social distancing requirements. Students would be assigned specific days to attend each week. SOMSD will make every effort to schedule students from the same family on the same days. In both hybrid and virtual learning models, your child will have access to live support and conferring sessions with SOMSD instructors.  <i>*Due to the complexity of high school master scheduling and our desire to continue offering our CHS students the robust and diverse course offerings that have made Columbia a unique institution, we are considering modified methodologies. More details will follow with the District’s Reopening Plan.</i>
<b>Special Education</b>	Special Education programming will be based on each child’s IEP and may entail supplemental and extended programming. IEP’s will be implemented to the greatest extent possible. The focus on IEP implementation is to provide as many in-person opportunities as possible for our most vulnerable students. The Special Services plans address both in-person/virtual models. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In addition to the scheduling considerations in the Elementary, Middle, and High School level, students with the highest IEP needs will be provided additional in-person instruction, as feasible.</li> <li>• Related Services (Speech, Physical, and Occupational Therapies as well as paraprofessional supports) will be provided virtually and in person, as scheduling allows.</li> <li>• Evidence-based Reading (EBR) will continue to be provided virtually and in person, as scheduling allows.</li> </ul>

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***Return to School Preference Form for Families:***

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To best prepare for your child, early next week the District will send via email, a Return-to-School Preference form to all families. **This form needs to be filled out for each child that will attend school for the 2020-2021 school year to indicate your choice for each child’s instruction.** This will help us with our staffing needs and instructional planning.

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***Canvas Learning Management System:***

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At the July 2020 Board of Education meeting, the District approved the purchase of a new Learning Management System (LMS), Canvas. Canvas will be used by all students and teachers in the South

Orange Maplewood School District. Using the new LMS, students will be able to interact during classes, actively engage in assignments, take quizzes, collaborate with peers, communicate with teachers, and more.

**All** courses will be housed in Canvas. This includes core content, as well as electives and specialized courses. This will enable us to shift to fully virtual instruction if additional school closures are required. Canvas will be for every student, every day regardless of their selected mode of instruction. Face-to-face students will participate in blended learning through the system while fully remote students will be able to access all coursework. Teachers will be able to host their lessons through district-provided web conferencing platforms (Cisco WebEx, Google Meets, etc.) and house them in Canvas as well as document attendance, assignments and all communication to students and parents. Canvas offers one location for parents to check student's work and associated grades. Many of the online resources that our teachers use are compatible with Canvas, seamlessly integrating with the platform.

In the coming weeks, more information will be provided about the District's journey launching Canvas and the next steps for families. Please take a moment to watch this brief video regarding Canvas: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=D2GMkW7OPQE](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D2GMkW7OPQE)

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***Back to School Preparation Checklist for Families***

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Below are some actions to take or things to consider from our District nurses and the CDC to help you prepare your children to take care of themselves and others if you choose the hybrid model (which includes in-person instruction) for back to school.

<b>Checklist</b>	
<b><i>Face Masks</i></b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Begin to create face coverings/masks endurance with your children. Model proper wearing of face covering: make sure it covers your nose and mouth, keep hands away from face. To remove, stretch ear loops/strings forward and hold by loops/strings, then fold outside corners together. Clean your hands after removing face covering.</li> <li>• Have multiple cloth face coverings so you can wash them daily and have back-ups ready (if possible, at minimum have at least 2 reusable face masks ready for your child for back to school).</li> <li>• Label your child's cloth face covering clearly in permanent marker so that they are not confused with those of other children.</li> <li>• Find reusable/washable face coverings that your child is comfortable wearing and gradually build up the amount of time they can tolerate wearing them (especially for our younger students).</li> <li>• Begin conversations with your children, explain the importance of masks and how it protects others from getting sick.</li> <li>• Consider talking to your children about other people who may not be able to wear cloth face coverings for medical reasons.</li> <li>• If you have young children, help build their comfort wearing a cloth face covering and become comfortable seeing others in face covers. Consider drawing pictures of people with face coverings as well as putting face coverings on stuffed toys, dolls, and action figures.</li> <li>• As always, remind your child to sneeze or cough into a sleeve or elbow, even when wearing a face covering.</li> </ul>
<b><i>Thermometer at home</i></b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If possible, please ensure that you have a working thermometer in your home.</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If this is a hardship, please email Karen Weiland at <a href="mailto:kweiland@somsd.k12.nj.us">kweiland@somsd.k12.nj.us</a>. Please include your name and phone number and we will contact you with details.</li> <li>• Please note that the definition of a fever is 100° F according to NJDOH and CDC guidelines for schools. If your child has a fever of 100 or greater, your child should not come to school.</li> </ul>
<b><i>Personal Supplies/Hand hygiene</i></b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consider having personal supplies of hand sanitizer (at least 60% alcohol-based) and a packet of tissues included in your child’s bookbag.</li> <li>• Practice hand hygiene: wash hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds: remember wrists and thumbs! If washing with soap and water is not possible, use alcohol-based hand sanitizer/wipes.</li> </ul>
<b><i>Six-feet Social Distancing</i></b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Practice social distancing. An outstretched pool noodle is a great visual for what six feet looks like.</li> <li>• Practice ways of greeting and feeling connected with thumbs up or waving instead of high-fives.</li> </ul>

We are also including a PDF attachment of the CDC’s, “Back to School Planning for In-Person Classes” checklist. It includes additional actions to take and points to consider regarding mental health & social-emotional well-being, ensuring your child(ren)’s information including emergency contacts are updated/current, reinforcing concepts of social distancing, transportation considerations and more.