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Dear South Orange & Maplewood School District Staff, Families, Students and Community:

As shared in our Reopening Plan communications last week, we are living in unprecedented times that require us to remain flexible. Our top priority and planning for this school year continue to be the health and well-being of our students, staff, families and community. Our current plan was based on the most recent data available, and was submitted to the County for review; we also shared that we may need to make adjustments as new data or guidelines are released.

Most recently, on Wednesday, August 12, New Jersey Governor Phil Murphy announced and issued [Executive Order 175](#), stating that school districts may delay in-person learning related to concerns about safety standards and provide remote-only instruction in the fall. The South Orange & Maplewood School District is making adjustments to the Reopening plan shared on August 8th based on several factors:

- The state's EO 175 announced on 8/12; as well as the [New Jersey Department of Health's new guidelines](#) released yesterday, 8/13.
- Review of the district's "Return to School Preference" form (to date 80% of district families have submitted responses)
- Staff medical leave submissions received due to health concerns;
- Concerns about the ability to ensure the health and safety of staff/students in some of our aging facilities;
- Consultation with local agencies and partners; and,
- Review of the instructional shift that many districts across our county, region, and state have recently announced to full-virtual or remote-only openings, due to current data regarding the uptick in young people contracting the virus.

The district will be moving forward with an all-virtual start to the school year for students in Pre-K through the 12th grade, delaying the start of a hybrid-in-person option, through the first marking period, November 12. Ideally, we would like to provide an in-person learning environment beginning this September; however, we are facing a situation that is far from ideal. We prefer to err on the side of caution and begin the year with significant improvements to our virtual-learning model under our new learning management system, Canvas. Also, after reviewing the survey results, we feel that this shift will allow for far more live instruction/student-teacher engagement for all.

Although district staff has worked extremely hard over the last several months, there is still much work that needs to be done to ensure the safety of our students and staff. The District began implementing costly safety measures throughout our school facilities. However, due to high demand, safety supplies are on backorder, and shipments are delayed across the state (i.e. antiseptic wipes, plexiglass for common areas, some nursing supplies, and air purifier equipment). At this date, critical supplies the district ordered in May/June to replenish and increase our stockpiles will not be available until the end of September or early 2021. In addition, the aging infrastructure in some of our schools, coupled with



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ventilation concerns (airflow, window repairs needed, carpeting that still needs to be removed), poses risks and challenges that will not be resolved for the start of the school year.

Stringent safety measures have been put in place in the areas of: transportation, screening, cleaning protocols, and staggering school schedules to support the start of in-classroom instruction. However, the uncertainty of this pandemic at this time lies in the fact, that even with all these measures in place, the threats posed are far too great for us to comfortably reopen schools for in-person learning (even in a limited capacity).

Childcare: South Mountain YMCA Collaboration

We understand that this is a shift from our original reopening plan; however, the changing landscape has warranted a pivot to full virtual learning. We also understand that this instructional change creates significant challenges for working parents and staff in our district; therefore, we are collaborating with the South Mountain YMCA to make necessary accommodations to offer childcare support. In addition, we will be working to train the YMCA to train their staff in using Canvas.

Through collaboration between the South Orange & Maplewood School District and the South Mountain YMCA, **we are pleased to announce scholarships and financial assistance for families in need.** We are also working with the Y to plan for possible expansion of their capacity utilizing targeted space in our schools if necessary. It is our priority to ensure equitable access to programming and the Y for All Financial Assistance Program is available to ensure scholarships are available to families who need our programs the most. District families can email Karen Weiland at kweiland@somds.k12.nj.us for support in accessing financial assistance. To reach the Y directly, please contact James Goodger at jgoodger@metroymcas.org.

Below are links to the YMCA's child care needs survey for the fall. If you are a current YMCA member and have already completed a previously emailed School Age Child Care survey, there is no need to complete this one.

- YMCA Survey for Parents: www.surveymonkey.com/r/SMYSACC
- YMCA Survey for District Employees: www.surveymonkey.com/r/SOMADistrict

We invite the community to join us for the next virtual BOE meeting on Mon., August 17 @ 7:30 pm, where we will provide some additional context on our shift to an all-virtual instruction start to the school year. For more information visit: www.somds.k12.nj.us/board-of-education/board-meetings

Specific details about individual student schedules, the structure of the all-virtual school day, and additional professional learning are in development and will be communicated shortly.

Educationally yours,

Dr. Ronald G. Taylor, Superintendent of Schools