



## Community Reopening Update

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February 15, 2021

# Overview

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The purpose of this communicate is to give our community a brief detailed update regarding our current circumstances including our reopening plans.

- + The South Orange and Maplewood Departments of Health latest Covid information.
- + The impact of the Governor's latest Executive Order
- + Tipping Points:
  - Staffing
  - Agreement with SOMEA
  - Facilities
  - CDC's Latest Guidance



# Executive Summary

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- + Phased hybrid re-entry reopening for all remaining grade levels will be on hold until **Monday, April 19**.
  - *We understand that families and students are greatly anticipating this return, but at this time we must be conservative in our actions to ensure that we can offer our students and families as much instructional consistency as possible.*
  - *The winter months are presenting a great challenge to our buildings, especially with the added level of scrutiny that Covid requires of our HVAC systems. An example of these challenges is the unexpected procurement and installation at the Marshall School, which is now completed.*
  
- + We will continue with **Phase 3** of our reopening plan, with a plan for a **potential return on April 19**. Why this date?
  - *It is two weeks after Spring Break, which will serve as a quarantine period for staff and families after potential travel.*
  - *Traditionally our building's heating systems are taken offline on April 15th. This will allow for us to utilize many more rooms in our schools. Therefore allowing for the return of all families who are selecting an in-person hybrid experience for their children.*

# Executive Summary (cont.)

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- + Lastly, we are of course thinking of next school year and the design of our schools. A lot of our decision making will depend on the possible shifting of State requirements. For example, if 'Virtual Learning' remains a mandate, then we will do all we can to identify specific all-virtual teachers (at least at the Elementary Level) for those students to allow for possibly returning to as close to a normal schedule for those families who select in person. Additional parental surveys will assist in our preparation.
- + The following slides provide a detailed explanation regarding key areas that have guided the District's decision to move out the date of our reopening strategy. Key areas include: local health & safety updates, Governor's executive order, tipping points, staffing, facilities and latest CDC guidelines.



# Health and Safety



**The following information is based on data received from our Departments of Health on Thursday, February 11, 2021 after our joint meeting on Tuesday, February 9.**

**The NJ Essex County COVID-19 Activity Level Index (CALI) Score is presently “3” which is orange or high, which it has been since November 13, 2020.**

**So far, we've had 35 confirmed reported cases that were contracted from community exposures (outside of school).**

**Everything we have done thus far is to prevent in school transmission, which is why rapid notification and communication of a positive COVID result, testing, and contact tracing to move swiftly into quarantine and isolation and virtual learning is key.**

# Local Statistics

Maplewood Department of Health...

# Maplewood Department of Health

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1. Confirmed cases to date 1015
2. New cases in January 197
3. New cases just in February (11 days in): 73
  - a. Age range 3-72 yo
  - b. Number of school age students (ages 5-17 years) 11

# Local Statistics

South Orange Department of Health...

# South Orange Department of Health

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1. Confirmed cases to date 608
2. New cases in January 145
3. New cases just in February (11 days in) 3
  - a. Age range 3 mos to 90 yo
  - b. Number of school age students (ages 5-17 years): 12

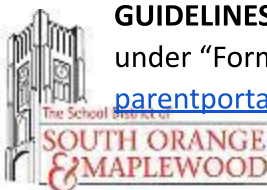


# Message from our Health Professionals...

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Before we proceed with the next phases in re-opening, it is important that you are aware of the realities of re-opening at this time and take these into consideration when you are deciding between hybrid or virtual learning for your children. This is not to talk you into either one, as we need both virtual and hybrid students in order for this plan to work; however, **if you choose hybrid**, please note:

1. We are planning this next Phase of opening with continued commitment to strict mitigating strategies which include most importantly: face masks, 6-foot distancing, frequent hand hygiene, and cleaning and disinfecting buildings daily. While these safeguards are necessary, they are not foolproof, especially if people are not compliant with these protocols while they are interacting in school
2. If all grades had been in person since January, there would have been several school closures across the district at different times for at least 2-5 days for further investigation and cleaning. During school closure, students would have all gone back to virtual learning.
  - a. Rationale: As per NJDOH guidelines, the local DOHs may recommend school closure for 2-5 days if there are two cases of COVID in a school within 14 days and are unrelated and independent of one another (eg. Not in the same household or not related to the same community event exposure). These precautions are taken to prevent in-school transmission.
3. In person learning increases the risk of exposure to COVID. To protect students and staff, there is the possibility that your student may go back and forth between in-person and virtual learning depending upon if they were identified as a close contact to a COVID + case in the school and COVID activity in the community.
4. If your child is in-person and is identified as a close contact of a confirmed positive case in school, you will get a letter explaining the importance of quarantine. Quarantine means stay home – not just from in-person school, but other extra-curricular activities your child may be involved in. This includes sports. Quarantine is presently 14 days, during which children will learn virtually.
5. Finally, if you choose hybrid, you must e-sign the **PARENT AGREEMENT LETTER OF COMPLIANCE WITH COVID-19 GUIDELINES** before your child will be allowed to attend in-person. This agreement letter is on the Parent Portal under “Forms”. If you are having difficulty with the Parent Portal, please email immediately [parentportalhelp@somsd.k12.nj.us](mailto:parentportalhelp@somsd.k12.nj.us)



# The Latest Executive Order from Governor Murphy



# Executive Order 220

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- + Under the executive order, up to two parents or guardians per athlete under the age of 21 will be able to attend indoor or outdoor youth sports practices and competitions. No other spectators are permitted, and even with the parents or guardians, indoor youth sporting events **may never exceed 35% capacity or 150 people**. All spectators must follow the Department of Health's sports activities guidance including **mask requirements, social distancing guidelines, and staying home when sick**. Spectators will be expected to cooperate with contact-tracing efforts. School districts will retain the ability to impose stricter guidelines and not allow spectators, and also have the discretion on whether and when to implement today's policy regarding parents or guardians.

# Executive Order 220

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- + This weekend Principal Sanchez and our Interim Athletic Director Ken Mullen communicated this shift to the families of our Columbia High School Student Athletes and we were excited to see our first Parental attendees join us this weekend. If you have further questions please feel free to reach out to the CHS Athletic Department .

# Tipping Points- Staffing



# Tipping Points - Staffing

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*In our previous communiques we have mentioned staffing as a very important tipping point for our phased return to school. We value our staff and we know that we cannot educate our children without Teachers! The chart that follows gives an update on our Teachers that fall into two work from categories- **504 Medical or Non-Medical***

## + **504 Medical**

- This simply means that this staff member request a medical exemption from returning to our physical school site and engaged in our virtual 504 accommodation review with our HR Director, Solicitor (former District 504 Officer) and our School District Physician.

## + **Non-Medical**

- These are individuals who may have not qualified for the 504 Medical accommodation but submitted a request through our waiver process. The waiver review includes our Principals and HR Department and is somewhat dependent on our ability to successfully cover the specific request if sick leave was taken in lieu of approval.



# Tipping Point Staffing... As of February 12, 2021

<b><u>WORK FROM HOME ACCOMMODATIONS</u></b>				
-	-	-	-	-
<b><u>SCHOOLS</u></b>	<b><u>504 MEDICAL</u></b>	<i>Pending</i>	<b><u>NON-MEDICAL</u></b>	<i>Pending</i>
Columbia High School	10	0	2	4
Maplewood Middle	3	0	3	
South Orange Middle	5	2	2	1
Clinton	2	1	1	2
Jefferson	3	0	1	
Marshall			1	1
Montrose				
Seth Boyden		0	1	
South Mountain		1	2	
Tuscan	1	1		1
District*	4	0		
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>9</b>
* Special Services Dept				



# Tipping Point...Staffing

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- + Thus far, a total of 41 Teachers have been approved to work from home with 14 more pending review for possible approval. This number is of course fluid, as we receive these requests sporadically.
- + As has been previously shared...in anticipation of staffing concerns our District enacted a **Permanent Substitute Teachers** methodology for all schools.
- + Previously permanent subs were only used at our secondary schools. We currently have assigned 2 Permanent Substitutes for each elementary school and added an additional position for each secondary school. These individuals come to each job site daily regardless of absences.
- + Our Principals have taken the initiative to work together to at times shift these individuals between buildings if a particular building is requiring more coverage than others.





# Tipping Point...Staffing

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Even with this methodology we still experienced challenges with coverage that have required our Principals to be creative. If Teachers receive Work From Home Accommodations for students who are in-person, we are still bound to cover those impacted classes with in-person certificated staff members. The size of our in-person hybrid classes has made this manageable in most situations.



# SOMEA Sidebar Agreement



# SOMEA Sidebar Agreement

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- + It has been widely publicized that during the second week of our hybrid launch, SOMEA challenged the District regarding the ventilation and HVAC concerns that we have shared publicly, which in turn have led to our previously approved Long Range Facility Plan.
- + Thankfully, parties were able to come to an agreement that allowed us to move forward with our Phase 3 Hybrid, while utilizing the grievance process to review spaces that Staff Members (and the Association) may disagree with the District on utilizing.
- + This agreement also meant that our Principals would reassign classrooms if they did not meet the description in our agreement...specifically:

# SOMEA Sidebar Agreement

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- + Functioning heating\ventilation units are those with a working motor/blower which are capable of maintaining adequate ventilation and room temperature in compliance with NJAC 12:100-13:3 (a)1 et.seq (68-79 degrees) with open windows, which may be opened at the discretion of the employee.
- + If a worksite is determined not to be fit for use, the Board will relocate the member to a worksite that is fit for use. If such a room is not available, the member will work remotely until such a time as an appropriate worksite becomes available.

# SOMEA Sidebar Agreement

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So far our agreement is serving its purpose and we are reviewing grievances from SOMEA Members as they are received as quickly as possible. We are also busily reviewing and repairing the areas of concern. Daily our Facilities Department, School Based Custodians and our HVAC vendor are ensuring that our HVAC systems are working as they were designed to.

While multiple schools have relocated teacher classroom assignments internally, only one teacher to date has been shifted to a different school building.

We have worked with Principals to project additional classroom availability, based on the agreed upon facility standards (for the potential of returning additional grades).



1. The Board and SOMEA (collectively referred to as the Parties) agree that there are a number of heating/ventilation units, both identified by the Board during its review and others by SOMEA, that are not working as intended, such that those worksites are deemed unfit for use. Functioning units are those with a working motor\blower which are capable of maintaining adequate ventilation and room temperature in compliance with N.J.A.C 12:100-13:3(a)1 et. seq. (68-79 degrees) with open windows, which may be opened at the discretion of the employee.
2. Beginning on Wednesday, January 27, 2021, the Parties will meet and confer and conduct walkthroughs regarding worksites to be occupied by members prior to such occupation to determine and verify whether the rooms are fit for use or require repair. If a worksite is determined not to be fit for use, the Board will relocate the member to a worksite that is fit for use. If such a room is not available, the member will work remotely until such time as an appropriate worksite becomes available.
3. SOMEA shall inform its members of the availability of 504 accommodations to the extent members may have preexisting conditions or illnesses, including those identified by the CDC, that place them at heightened risk of severe illness from COVID-19. Members who have conditions which place them at increased risk should they develop COVID-19 as determined by a licensed physician must submit documentation describing the condition and should set forth the recommended accommodation. Members at risk or that might be at increased risk of severe illness that provide appropriate medical documentation from a licensed physician documenting the medical necessity of a work from home accommodation shall be granted a work from home accommodation consistent with the requirements of Section 504, the ADA, and the New Jersey Law Against Discrimination.
4. Issues and/or violations of the CBA not addressed herein shall be resolved through the grievance process. The parties reserve all rights, remedies, and defenses thereto.

# Facilities Update



# Facilities Updates...

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In preparation for returning to Hybrid many walkthroughs have occurred. They have included SOMEA members, NJEA representatives, Principals, Assistant Principals, Central Office Staff, Facilities Department representatives among many others.

The walkthroughs have shown things that we already were aware of. Our buildings in many cases are in need of significant repair. This is of course connected to our Long Range Facilities Plan (Expansion and Improvement) that was approved by the Board of School Estimate last year and is now in the State's review phase.

Our Architects also performed 3rd party spot checks which resulted in a snapshot of our systems at the time of their review. This was shared publicly and is available still on our website.





# Facilities Updates...

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We have been working diligently with our Principals in determining which rooms should be used. This includes running records that help us to manage this work. In many cases unfortunately, the repairs are cyclical.

One important caveat to this work includes certain rooms with **motors/blowers** that push out heat to our classrooms. These are an important part of our HVAC systems and without operational motors/blowers, we cannot use the applicable rooms during the winter (via our sidebar agreement).

We have approximately 45 classroom motors that have been sent out for factory repair (or replacement) by our HVAC vendor. We have been following up with the Nesbitt (Manufacturer) as it has been several weeks since these items have been sent to them. We have received a written communique stating that they are behind by several weeks as their repair facility has been intermittently shut down because of Covid 19 and also due to the many schools that require these services at this time.



# Center for Disease Control's Latest Guidance



# Center for Disease Control's Latest Guidance...

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- + With proper mitigation, such as masking, physical distancing and hygiene, elementary schools can operate in person at any level of community virus transmission, the guidelines state.
- + “Essential Elements of Safe K-12 School In-person Instruction: Regardless of the level of community transmission, all schools should use and layer mitigation strategies. Five key mitigation strategies are essential to safe delivery of in-person instruction and help to mitigate COVID-19 transmission in schools:
  - *Universal and correct use of masks*
  - *Physical distancing*
  - *Handwashing and respiratory etiquette*
  - *Cleaning and maintaining healthy facilities*
  - *Contact tracing in combination with isolation and quarantine, in collaboration with the health department*”
- + The guidelines say teacher vaccination, while important, should not be considered a prerequisite for reopening shuttered schools.
  - <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/02/12/us/cdc-school-guidelines-faq.html>

# Center for Disease Control's Latest Guidance...

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- + We will continue to work with our Departments of Health regarding these guidelines and the interpretation of them when applied to our specific District circumstances.
- + It is important to note that these guidelines do not supercede our Sidebar agreement with SOMEA or the direct recommendations from our Local Departments of Health.

# Summation



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- + At a time when many in our area have remained in an all-virtual setting, we have been ecstatic to have our students return in **Phase 3 (Pre K thru 2nd, 6th, 9th Special Education and English Language Learners)** of our Hybrid methodology. During my visits it has felt like 'school' again. We have heard from so many parents praising this return and the positive impact on their children.
- + That is why it pains me to share that with the uncertainty of aforementioned variables (staffing, facilities), at this time **we cannot commit to bringing in more grade levels to our school buildings as we had hoped.** The winter months are presenting a great challenge to our buildings, especially with the added level of scrutiny that Covid requires of our HVAC systems. An example of these challenges is the unexpected procurement and installation at the Marshall School, which is now completed.
- + We understand that families and students are greatly anticipating this return, but at this time we must be conservative in our actions to ensure that we can offer our students and families as much instructional consistency as possible.

# Summation

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- + At this time the most prudent action for us to take is to continue with **Phase 3** of our reopening plan, with a plan for a **potential return on April 19**. Why this date?
  - It is two weeks after Spring Break, which will serve as a quarantine period for staff and families after potential travel.
  - Traditionally our building's heating systems are taken offline on April 15th. This will allow for us to utilize many more rooms in our schools. Therefore allowing for the return of all families who are selecting an in-person hybrid experience for their children.
- + Lastly, we are of course thinking of next school year and the design of our schools. A lot of our decision making will depend on the possible shifting of State requirements. For example, if 'Virtual Learning' remains a mandate, then we will do all we can to identify specific all-virtual teachers (at least at the Elementary Level) for those students to allow for possibly returning to as close to a normal schedule for those families who select in person. Additional parental surveys will assist in our preparation.