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July 23, 2020

Dear Parent/Guardian:

I trust that you and your families continue to remain safe during these times and that you are somehow able to enjoy something of this unique Summer Break.

I want to thank the parents of our returning students who worked closely with our teachers and administrators to ensure that our students received instruction during our rapid transition to remote learning in March. It was a tremendous effort, but we have learned a lot and have taken some steps to greatly improve our on-line learning model. For our new parents, I want to welcome you and cannot wait for the day that we can meet each other in person.

As we near the end of July I know that you have many questions about what will happen in September and I hope that this letter will address many, if not all, of your questions.

Will my child physically have to attend school?

No. The Governor just recently announced that parents in New Jersey will have a choice whether they want to send their students to school. However, we strongly encourage your child to come if it is possible.

What if I don't want my child to physically go to school. How will he/she learn?

We will be implementing our Remote Learning system. You will be provided with the schedule of classes and their meeting times. It is important, however, that your child adheres to all the requirements of our Remote Learning Model which includes daily attendance, submitting assignments in a timely manner, and professional conduct while on video conferences.

If I choose to send my child to school how many days will it be?

Attached to this correspondence will be a mock schedule that allow for students to attend school *physically* for at least one day a week. The Principals of the schools will provide further information. All schools will have Remote Learning on Wednesdays.

Will there be full days of school?

No. There will be shortened sessions that end at 1:30 pm. On the days students will be attending they will be asked to arrive and depart at staggered times. Principals will provide further information as it pertains to your child.

Will specialized populations, including special education students with Individual Education Programs (IEPs), students with Section 504 plans, and English Learners receive supports?

Yes. Every effort will be made to provide free appropriate public education (FAPE) to students with IEPs and 504 plans. Related services will be provided to students in accordance with their IEPs. Compensatory services will be offered to returning students as determined by the Child Study Team (CST).

Will the district provide transportation?

No. Sending districts provide transportation services. While the Office of Student-Related Services works with sending districts and their providers to arrange transportation for eligible students, the district does not provide transportation.

Will bus tickets or transportation reimbursements be provided?

Newark residents who live within 2.5 miles from their school may receive bus tickets. However, parents should contact their sending district school for specific guidelines on bus tickets and transportation reimbursements.

How will the district support my child's social and emotional learning (SEL)?

In addition to instructional staff, coaches, and club advisors, each school has support services staff members, including school counselors, student assistance coordinators (SACs), child study teams (CST), nurses, and out-of-district referral agencies, to assist with SEL. Additionally, programs like Senior Peer Mentoring, leadership development, grade-level convocations, extracurricular clubs, community service, service-learning, character education, guest speakers, and individual/group counseling sessions are all designed to support SEL.

What about the busing of my child to and from school?

We will be working with the sending districts to arrange the busing schedule for your child and will provide you with more information later.

What if there is an increase in COVID-19 cases in our state and the Governor says that schools cannot have students physically attend?

In that situation, we will adhere to our Remote Learning Schedule for our instruction.

What if there is a decrease in COVID-19 cases in our state in a few weeks or months?

We will continually monitor the situation and stay in contact with regarding our future plans. As it stands right now, I think that this Modified Hybrid Schedule will be in place for at least the month of September. When things begin to improve, and we receive direction from the Governor and our County Health Department, we can then begin to increase the number of students physically coming into school and the extending the day to our normal time.

What about the Breakfast and Lunch Programs?

We are working on a few plans right now in how we can best address the dissemination of food. But, regardless of how it is done, breakfast and lunch will be provided on the days your child physically attends school. We are planning now to have student take home Grab & Go bags for the days that they will not be physically in the buildings. We are also working out a plan for parents who choose not to physically send their children to school to provide a separate Pick-Up Time and Location.

What if my child experiences technology problems with his/her computer or internet connection?

They can go to the Tech Help Desk at: The Donald M. Payne Sr. Technical High School at 498-544 West Market Street, Newark, NJ 07107, Monday through Friday from 9:00 am till 12:00 pm or they can call: 973.412.2295 or 973-412-2283.

They can also check out our Technology FAQ located on our Virtual High School Website at <https://vhs.g.essextech.org>

Will my child be required to wear a mask when he/she is physically in school?

Yes. Our goal is to keep everyone safe, therefore students will be required to wear their masks at all times. In certain instances, upon the approval of the teacher or administrator, students will be allowed to take a break from their masks when social distancing of six feet or more can be made available.

Will my child still have to wear his/her uniform when he/she physically attends school?

Yes. For more information on where to obtain uniform materials you can contact the principal.

Will masks be provided, or do I have to purchase them? What if he/she has a medical condition that prevents masks?

No. We will provide masks with school logos and will not allow other masks to be worn. Each student will be given two cloth masks that can be washed and reused. Any medical conditions should be directed to the school principal.

Will the teachers and other staff members be required to wear masks?

Yes.

Will each of the three schools in the district have the same schedule?

No. We are working with the unique needs of each of our schools so, therefore, there will be some slight differences. However, the number of days, start and dismissal times, and quality of in-person and remote instruction will all be the same.

What are you doing to clean the buildings and prevent any further spread of the virus?

We will be cleaning and sanitizing all areas that are high touch points and areas where contact with surfaces is several times through the school day. A variety of effective cleaning and disinfectant products. On Wednesdays, when all students are participating in Remote Learning, each school will receive a deep cleaning that includes steam and other methods from our custodial services. In addition, we have been working closely with the Essex County Department of Health and the Essex County Department of Education to ensure that we are adhering to all protocols and guidelines.

Will the schools look different?

A little bit. We will be putting up directional signs for one-way hall and stairway traffic as well as reminders for masks and social distancing.

Do you really expect students to learn in this type of environment?

We understand that these are very uncertain times that none of us have ever experienced. We are doing our best to provide the best level of normalcy that we can as we continue to deliver the instruction that your child needs to prepare him/her for these new and challenging times.

Will there be extra-curricular activities and sports?

We understand the need for students to want to engage in non-academic activities and will be trying our best to include as many as can be done that observe all health and safety regulations.

Will visitors and parents be allowed in the schools?

Unfortunately, no. We will create areas in our vestibules so that the sanitization in the buildings are not comprised. If you need to contact the school, please call the main office at:

Newark Tech: 973-412-2266

Payne Tech: 973-412-2203

West Caldwell Tech: 973-412-2243

We understand that COVID-19 is important but there are also important movements occurring in our country like Black Lives Matter. What are you doing to ensure that my child is being provide a well-balanced and representative inclusive curriculum?

Our teachers and administrators have worked together this summer to ensure that all areas of instruction are inclusive and include the contributions and accomplishments of people who have not been traditionally included. We also understand that this is not a one-time fix, but something the needs to happen on a continual basis and ensure that our protocols and practices reflect this.

This is a lot of information. Will we have a Parent or Student Orientation Meeting to review all of this?

Yes. Here are the dates for those virtual meetings:

Newark Tech: Parent Orientation-August 10 at 5:30 pm. Student Orientation-August 11 at 1:00 pm

Payne Tech: Parent Meeting: August 18 at 5:00 pm

West Caldwell Tech: Parent Meeting: August 13 at 5:30 pm

You will be provided later with the access codes for the meetings.

What else can I do to keep my child safe?

Check your child's temperature every day before he/she leaves for school. Any child who has temperature over **100.4** must stay home until he/she is fever free for 24 hours. If you or your child has come in close direct contact with someone who has tested positive for COVID-19 please keep your child at home and call the school Principal for further instructions. If your child leaves the state or the country, please do not send your child to school and call the school Principal for further instructions. Lastly, when not in school, have your child observe social distancing, hand washing and other measures that can reduce the spread of the virus. In addition, please ensure that if your child takes public transportation, that he/she observes all safety protocols as well.

Do I need to provide school supplies for my child?

The principals from each school will provided further information regarding the supplies needed to be required and those that will be provided. It is important to note, that we encourage all students not to let their supplies be handled by other students.

Should I send bottled water with my child?

Bringing in bottled water is encouraged. Because we want to reduce the spread of the virus, the water fountains will be supervised and regularly sanitized. Therefore, access to them will be limited.

What if there is a confirmed case at the school?

The Principals of each building will work with the Superintendent and the Essex County Health Office to ensure that all protocols for contact tracing and safety are observed with everyone being properly notified with what steps should be followed next.

Please note that this situation is changing - sometimes on what seems to be an hourly basis. In some instances, we are aware of some of the new developments but in many others, we are finding out along with the rest of the public. Our goal for this correspondence is to share our tentative plan so that you can best create your own plan based on the needs of your families.

We understand that this is a very frustrating and trying time, but we can be united in working together to help our children through. There will be a time, in the very near future, where this will be behind us, but until then, we must stay together and keep our students focused on learning so that they will be prepared to assume the leadership positions in our country to be agents of positive change.

I welcome your feedback. You can contact me at jpedersen@essextech.org.

Sincerely,

Dr James Pedersen
Superintendent of Schools

ESSEX COUNTY VOCATIONAL TECHNICAL SCHOOLS WAS ORGANIZED IN 1923

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