July 24, 2020

Dear Members of the Community,

In an effort to keep our parent partners informed about ongoing return-to-school planning, I wanted to provide you with the general direction of those efforts and clearer understanding of the public health regulations guiding our decision-making.

At the end of next week, our District will be providing a non-binding plan to the State. Our plan currently consists of three reopening scenarios; a remote instruction (distance learning) framework, a blended plan that provides a balance of in-person and remote instruction, as well as an outline of necessary considerations for safely and fully reopening our schools.

At this juncture, I would like to share that a full reopening of school as it once functioned is unlikely anytime soon. This is why we have been deeply immersed in working out the applied dimensions of remote instruction alongside a blended model. Central to both of these scenarios is our commitment to assuring quality learning experiences for all students.

The leadership team, composed of all school administrators across the District has researched best practices, met with colleagues across the region, and worked side-by-side to develop practical solutions for our students and their families. We have examined other return-to-school models proposed by schools across the region, and I have been immersed in dialog with superintendents across NYS.

Core considerations of our planning efforts are aligned to accomplish the following:

- Satisfy all public health and student safety guidance (mask wearing, reduced density, social distancing, cohort modeling, daily health checks, etc.)
- Introduce uniformity across the three scenarios (remote, blended, full return) so that any shifts between scenarios required by changing public health circumstances are nondisruptive
- Acknowledge and support the social-emotional health of students
- Provide reaffirming personal attention to students in the building on in-person instructional days
- Align student schedules for all students within a family to allow for continuity of care

In addition to inclusion of best practices from public health reports, the NYS Education Department published a 145-page “Recovering, Rebuilding & Renewing” guidance document for responsibly planning our return-to-school. The Blind Brook return-to-school plan is predicated on those guidelines. It is most likely that at this point in time, we will be returning to school under the framework described in the blended or in-person/remote scenario. This is the strongest piece of guidance from the State, and this approach is most likely to be carried out by most of our neighboring districts as well.
Data and suggestions gathered from the online parent survey administered in May have heavily informed the remote instruction portion of the blended return-to-school plan. These are a few highlights from the survey results which enhanced the remote learning portion of our hybrid plan:

- More frequent and interactive synchronous (live) learning
- A variety of ways for students to interact with educators (i.e., full class, small groups, and individual) via chat and video
- Consistent and predictable scheduling and communication regarding synchronous learning classes, check-ins with teachers, etc.
- Meaningful feedback on work completed to guide student learning
- Adequate support for technical devices and software such as Google classroom
- Adequate support for students with IEPs/504s

I am pleased to report that, based on this input and the hard work of our leadership team, we are now ready to solicit community feedback with a second online survey. I am appreciative that much of the community has been eager to provide additional input to the planning process, and now that we have the fundamentals from the NYS guidelines as the foundation of our plan, we are seeking community input on the facets of the plan where we have flexibility regarding scheduling, transportation, and other considerations for reopening schools. To access the reopening survey, CLICK HERE.

On related District news, Blind Brook High School Commencement ceremonies are this weekend. In recognition of the efforts of our graduating Seniors, I offer a HUGE shout-out to every graduate for their hard work and determination! This was a very difficult year for each of you, and I think I can say on behalf of the entire community just how proud we all are for what you have accomplished under such difficult conditions!

In solidarity with Mayor Rosenberg’s message this week, I ask that each of you continue to look out for the wellbeing of others across the community by adhering to Phase 4 social gatherings rules. This means limiting guests at graduation parties to under 50 people and by wearing masks wherever you are unable to maintain a 6-feet of social distance. We can learn from the experience of Chappaqua, where a marked increase in coronavirus was attributed to graduation parties.

One final note in the continuing interest of public health, cases of coronavirus are increasing exponentially in many states across the country. Communities that manage to contain transmission of the coronavirus will be best prepared to safely reopen their schools. Governor Cuomo has set markers that if exceeded will impede school reopening plans. To prevent a resurgence of coronavirus in NYS, the State has declared that anyone who travels to one of the states that is experiencing a coronavirus outbreak must quarantine for 14 days upon return to NYS.

Please be aware if your vacation destination is among the 31 states currently on this quarantine list so that you can include the required quarantine period in your vacation calendar upon return home to Rye Brook. States on the quarantine list can be found at THIS LINK.

Thank you for your continued support and remember that we are all in this together!

Respectfully,

Dr. Patrick Brimstein
Superintendent of Schools