Responsible Preparation for In-Person Learning

Dear Blind Brook Community,

The Board of Education, Association of Blind Brook Administrators, Blind Brook Federation of Teachers, and BB/R Employees Local 4060 are united in their commitment to provide rich, in-person learning experiences for all Blind Brook students to the greatest extent practicable during the pandemic.

We have learned a great deal about public health management since March 2020. Today, we know what strategies work to mitigate COVID-19 transmission, and we can effectively reduce potential spread through quarantine. We have been very successful assuring student and staff safety.

Once again, we find ourselves at a crossroads. Do we continue with the hybrid model that we have implemented, or do we evolve our successes toward greater in-person learning opportunities for students? We have answered this question after rigorous evaluation, research, and consultation with experts.

Done judiciously, we believe Blind Brook Schools can safely open to full time in-person learning in stages throughout March and April. One key metric in determining the pace of our progress toward full reopening will be the percentage of staff vaccinated. Safety increases as more staff are vaccinated.

Our collective ability to provide in-person learning at Blind Brook is dependent upon a robust immunization program that gets the vaccine in the arms of every staff member willing and able to receive a shot. This basic protection will provide the necessary assurance to provide in-person learning.

The American Academy of Pediatrics describes 3-6 foot social distance with masks. Dr. Amler from the Westchester County Department of Health (DOH) modified contact tracing requirements, effectively reducing the need for undo quarantines. Our District has adjusted its notifications accordingly.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has indicated that schools can reopen during the pandemic if social distancing and mask-wearing are maintained. Dr. Anthony Fauci was interviewed by NBC News, and he offered his assessment of the CDC guidance. https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/fauci-backs-cdc-s-school-reopening-plan-we-need-try-n1256060
An article in a leading international medical journal outlines clear mitigation strategies and identifies required protections to responsibly increase in-person learning.

https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jama/fullarticle/2775875

Additionally, we refer to safety measures provided by local and federal public health authorities. https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/index.html

There is near universal agreement that the benefits of in-person learning are immeasurable. The rewards extend beyond the intellectual into social-emotional dimensions of human development.

Recent pronouncements by public leaders and information provided by scientists have aligned to suggest that in-person learning in the classroom can be safely carried out. President Biden issued an executive order that supports the safe reopening of schools, while NYS Governor Cuomo stated that decisions on reopening schools for in-person learning will be made at the local level.

Along with our commitment to advocate and monitor the progress of staff vaccinations, we are also committed to testing a minimum of five to ten percent of our school community each week to monitor the presence of COVID-19 in our schools. These data will inform our stages of reopening. We are asking local and state government to provide continuous surveillance testing. Parental advocacy to obtain vaccinations and surveillance testing will help to advance community efforts to increase in-person learning in the safest and most responsible manner possible. (parent letter template attached).

The Board of Education, whose service is focused on what is best for our students, supports the Blind Brook Administrative Leadership Team, Teachers, and Staff Members to collectively engage in a coordinated planning effort to identify the best possible plan moving forward. Our planning efforts are underway.

An overview of the planning process and timeline for stages of return to in-person learning will be presented during the next Board of Education meeting on Tuesday, February 9th.

Respectfully,

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In order for Public School Districts across New York State to successfully return to full time in-person learning, we must be able to protect the health, safety and wellbeing of students and staff members. In addition to mask wearing, physical distancing, ventilation and cleaning protocols, school personnel require access to vaccinations.

We call on NYS legislators to prioritize immediate access to vaccines for all K-12 staff members to ensure the safe return to full time, in-person learning.

In addition to vaccinations, public school districts require a robust rapid surveillance testing program to continuously monitor the presence of COVID-19 in our schools. It is financially unsustainable for school districts to be responsible to pay for COVID-19 testing.

We call on NYS legislators to ensure that public school districts are provided with the logistical and financial support to guarantee random COVID-19 testing of students and staff is sufficient to keep buildings open for full time in-person learning.

Please support public education in New York State by funding expense-based aid that will help our public schools return to full time in-person learning.

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