

Town Hall Questions

The following questions were addressed by Superintendent Ravally and members of Senior Staff at the Town Hall Meeting on Tuesday, August 4, 2020.

Information was provided by Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction, Mr. Daniel Loughran on the [Fully Remote Program Option \(FRPO\)](#).

Scheduling

- 1. Is the default selection the hybrid choice if a parent/guardian doesn't choose either fully remote or hybrid?** *Yes, a parent must opt out of the hybrid model to receive the fully remote program. If a parent does not opt out, the student will be placed in a hybrid program. After August 15th, a parent can change the program selected for their student by contacting the child's building administrator.*
- 2. How can I choose the [FRPO option](#) and how can I switch back?** *A form allowing families to choose FRPO is posted on the district website and will remain active until August 15. Going forward in the school year, families wishing to choose FRPO will be able to do so by contacting their child's principal. Confirmation of the change will be sent to the parent/guardian, typically within 3 school days. Families wishing to switch back to the hybrid schedule will also do so in writing to the building principal. A switch to hybrid learning may take up to 30 days giving the school the necessary time to create a safe schedule for the child.*
- 3. When will students be notified of their placement on a particular team, their homeroom assignment and/or schedule for next year?** *We anticipate notifying students of their cohort placement sometime within the next three weeks. The process is labor intensive because we are attempting to keep students within a family across grade levels in the same cohort.*
- 4. Will I be able to see which weeks my child will be in school/remote learning environment for the whole school year?** *Yes, the schedule has been laid out with the district calendar in mind and will be posted on the district website around the same time student cohort information is released.*

Program/Instruction/FieldTrips

- 1. Will grading be the same for students in the hybrid and FRPO programs?** *Yes, we intend to align our grading policy in the hybrid model to what we normally do. We continue to work through barriers that complicate our normal grading routines and will do so for the remainder of the summer. Any changes to the grading policy, if necessary, will be communicated at the start of the school year.*
- 2. How will attendance be taken when a student is working remotely, either in the hybrid or FRPO program?** *Elementary students will record their presence via Seesaw, the elementary learning management software system while our secondary students will record their presence in Genesis, the student information system if possible and if not through Google Classroom.*
- 3. Will remote learning feature more teacher-led instruction?** *In the hybrid program, most teacher-led instruction will take place during the week that the student is in school. When students are learning remotely, most activities will be asynchronous. However, there will be opportunities for students to check in with teachers when they are learning remotely as well as times when students will be invited to participate in whole group learning activities, in a virtual space, at the teacher's discretion. At all levels these opportunities will include synchronous SEL activities as well as some academic discussion times. Teacher office hours for students in the secondary level will also be available. The specific times and number of synchronous activities will vary by grade level and subject.*
- 4. Why can't we utilize cameras or other technology to allow students at home and those in the classroom to interact with the teacher and learn at the same time?** *Simultaneous or synchronous learning raises two important issues. Some families who have students working remotely may not be able to join a class at a certain time due to schedules in their home. Secondly, the streaming of a live class or the recording of a live class that includes student interaction and which may be seen by individuals outside of that class raises issues of privacy for the students in the classroom. However we do envision opportunities throughout a week where all students will interact via a virtual space using appropriate learning management software.*
- 5. Will students work be provided by their individual teachers or district wide per grade level like it was at the end of the last school year?** *Work will be provided by individual teachers; additional staff members will assist, but students will be linked to specific content area and homeroom teachers, so that students have work tailored to their specific learning contexts.*

Health/Safety

- 1. When will students be required to wear masks? What if my child forgets his/hers?** *Students will be required to wear face coverings on a school bus and while in all areas of the school unless they provide a note from a doctor explaining why the student is unable to wear a mask. While seated and consuming food/drink students will be allowed to remove their face coverings. While consuming food and drink students must maintain appropriate physical distancing. Each school will have a supply of extra masks in the event that a child or staff member forgets theirs.*
- 2. If a student in my child's class tests positive for Covid-19 or his/her teacher does, will I be notified?** *When the district is notified that a student or staff member has tested positive for Covid-19, they will notify the lead nurse who will then notify the Somerset County Department of Health. The lead nurse will work with that agency to set up contact tracing and the appropriate student families will be notified that someone has tested positive. Information will only be given to those deemed appropriate and released in a way to preserve the privacy of the individual.*
- 3. How many reported positive cases would be needed to close the school or the district?** *Positive cases are reported to the Somerset County Department of Health. When that agency deems it warranted, they will suggest that a school building be closed. Under their recommendation, the Superintendent may close a school building or if necessary all schools in the district.*
- 4. Let's say a class or building is closed. Is it for a 14 day period and how disruptive could that be if it becomes frequent in various schools?** *Decisions on school and building closings will be made by the county and local health department. The hybrid model allows each school to move fluidly between in-person and remote if necessary based on the health department guidelines.*
- 5. Will Covid-19 testing be mandatory for staff members?** *Covid-19 testing is not mandatory, however, we are working with the Township to provide free testing for our staff and student families later this month. Information will be posted on our website for staff testing at two school locations on Thursday, August 20 and Friday, August 21, 2020. That following week, August 23-25 two locations will be open each day for our student families to be tested if they wish to be.*

Buildings/Supplies

- 1. How often will the following locations be cleaned? Will additional cleaning personnel be hired to assist in cleaning the facilities of the district?**

The district is looking to provide support to our custodial staff.

- a. High contact areas in classrooms at the elementary level will be cleaned as often as possible and for sure while students are at lunch. At the secondary level classrooms will be cleaned as often as possible during the day. School buildings will be thoroughly cleaned after dismissal. All buildings will undergo a deep cleaning every Friday between student cohort changes.*
- b. Bathrooms will be cleaned on a regular schedule during the day.*
- c. Buses will be cleaned in between routes using the same cleaning supplies used by the district. In between runs the buses will be more thoroughly cleaned at the depot and again at the end of the day.*

- 2. Can the list of chemicals used in the buildings be shared? Yes the list of cleaners used in our facilities can be acquired by contacting the Assistant Superintendent for Business, Mr. Jonathan Toth. MSDS sheets are available for all products and again can be obtained from the Assistant Superintendent for Business.**

- 3. How will classrooms be set up to ensure physical distancing? We have allotted 44 square feet per student thus allowing students to have 3 feet of personal space and 6 feet of socially distanced space. Our source for this number was the National Council on School Facilities. As per the NJDOE guidance we intend on arranging desks in a forward facing arrangement. We hope to be able to post a visual of a typical classroom on the website shortly. Additionally our principals will be sharing school based details of the back to school plan with you in an upcoming presentation later this month.**

- 4. Are HS students changing classrooms & if so how would that look like when they pass through the hallways? What about elementary students? Yes, they will be changing classrooms. Protocols to maximize safety are still being finalized, in accordance with NJDOE and Somerset County guidance, including directional signs for “up” and “down” stairwells, etc. In our elementary schools, students will remain in their homerooms, for the most part, with staff members pushing in to provide instruction as needed, beyond that which is typically provided by the homeroom teacher.**

Transportation

- 1. How many students will be allowed on a bus?** *The current Somerset County Department of Health guidelines suggest no more than 14 students on a bus, which conflicts with the NJDOE guidance which allows for more. We are currently establishing routes using SCDOH guidance which is more conservative of the two. We intend that students will be seated with a seat between them and in every other row. We hope to be able to post a visual on the website depicting this set up shortly.*
- 2. Why can't bus drivers take student's temperatures when they are boarding the bus?** *In lieu of temperature screenings on buses, which could considerably lengthen bus rides thus increasing exposure time, the district will ask parents/guardians to complete a health screening on the child before leaving the house and record the results of that health screening on Genesis. Additionally temperature screenings will take place upon arrival at school for all students and throughout the day for an individual as deemed necessary in accordance with the SCDOH interim guidance.*
- 3. Can I still waive transportation?** *Transportation waiver forms can be obtained from the transportation department.*

Meals

- 1. How can we maintain social distance in the cafeteria?** *Students will be assigned a specific seat in the cafeteria and use that seat everyday of the "week" that they have in person instruction. In the larger schools such as the high school, lunches may be spread out to areas beyond the cafeteria, such as the gymnasium, events lobby, and auditorium.*
- 2. How will meals be distributed to students who are learning remotely?** *Pending approval from applicable agencies, meals will be distributed to all families on Fridays in bulk from the four schools and 31 bus stops where they were distributed last school year.*

Extracurricular Activities/Athletics

- 1. Can students in the FRPO participate in athletics?** *Yes as per the NJDOE guidance, though they would have to be transported to practices by their families.*
- 2. Who will participate in remote extracurricular activities?** *Remote extracurricular activities will be held following the in person school day. Students who are in remote learning that week will participate.*
- 3. What will athletics look like this year?** *The athletic program will be administered under the guidance of the NJSIAA. Currently the guidance speaks to summer practices only. Other information as it becomes available will be posted on the athletic website.*

Climate and Culture

- 1. How will students remain socially distant during the day?** *Wearing masks and keeping physical distance will become part of the climate and culture of our schools. These behaviors will become part of the PBIS acceptable behaviors and PBIS goals will be established to encourage the consistent practice of socially distant behaviors. Behaviors which could affect the safety of the students and staff of the district are being identified by the district safety team and will be addressed in a district wide protocol and supplement to the district wide code of conduct. Each school will work with their safety team and Covid response teams to tailor responses to these behaviors in their school.*
- 2. Who will enforce the new safety protocols?** *All staff members will be responsible for enforcing the protocols. Safety officers might remind students upon entry to keep their mask on or remain physically distant. While a teacher and/or building level administrator might encourage or reward a student for being vigilant through the PBIS system of behaviors and positive reinforcement.*
- 3. How are we managing student anxiety in these times?** *In our planning for this school year social emotional well-being of our students is paramount. At all grade levels we have supports to address social emotional needs, including synchronous check ins which is one way to support emotional needs; in addition, school counselors and Student Assistance Counselors (SACs) will be in touch with students and families on a regular basis; and we also will have additional staff onboarded this year in the form of Rutgers University Behavioral Health clinicians to address more acute SEL needs.*

Child CARE

1. Will CARE be available?

- a. Due to capacity restraints, before and aftercare will be available in our schools under the management of the Greater Somerset YMCA for students in the hybrid program who are in school that week.*
- b. The YMCA is considering an additional childcare program for those hybrid students who are learning remotely during a given week. Two locations are under consideration First Baptist Church on Route 27 and Community Baptist Church on DeMott Lane.*
- c. Two other childcare providers, Lightbridge Academy and the Sapling School have also reached out to the district to inquire about the schedule so they may tailor a program to meet our families' needs.*
- d. If you know of anyone who has a licensed childcare business who wishes to learn more information about our programs, please ask them to contact the central office. We are encouraging all licensed care providers throughout the township to work with us to better meet the needs of our families.*
- e. Information on the [YMCA of Greater Somerset CARE](#) program is posted on our website.*

Questions About Specific Groups of Students or Courses of Study

- 1. How will therapies be implemented in a fully remote program? Can therapies be scheduled after hours?** *Therapies may be conducted virtually as well as in person depending upon the needs of the student and availability of the therapy providers. Alternate times for conducting therapies such as times outside of the regularly schooled day is being explored.*
- 2. How will children who need extra reading, writing or math support be served?** *Students who need support may receive it in person and/or virtually through the Academic Support Program.*
- 3. How does all of this apply to Pre K students?** *Similar to the K-5 experience, students will be connected with a homeroom teacher and will experience learning in hybrid and/or FRPO models. The district has been working with the NJ DOE to ensure that all preschool 3 and 4 classes will continue as proposed and will comply with department guidelines. Preschool students will attend school on the Blue or Gold schedule, along with the K-12 students, and will be cohorted with their siblings. The preschool will be using ReadyRosie, an online platform, to engage with preschool students and families, which complements the HighScope curriculum and GOLD assessment tools.*
- 4. FHS incoming Freshman** *will also be hearing about a virtual orientation shortly.*
- 5. What will music lessons look like?** *Music, art and dance lessons will follow Arts Ed NJ suggestions and NJDOE guidance. Specific details are being refined by the program director in collaboration with our music teachers, and specific details will be added as addenda to our official school plan once they are finalized.*
- 6. How will the FHS students who are in a shared program with the Somerset County Vocational Technical School be treated, what team will they be on?** *The FHS administration is working with Somerset Vocational Technical School to arrange for the students who share their program between FHS and VoTec. We believe that these students will be able to attend in person instruction at FHS and VoTec every week. Transportation will be provided for these students. The FHS Guidance Department will be reaching out to these student families with further details.*