



Kathleen W. Taylor, Ed.D.
Superintendent of Schools

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Dear School Community:

The Ocean City School District and Board of Education understand just how critical it is for students to be in school with their teachers. We have not ignored the risks presented by the pandemic this year, yet we have worked cooperatively and creatively to open on time for in-person learning in September and remain open. We are one of just a few area districts to accomplish both. Now, using what we have learned since September, we are prepared for our next big step: a return to five days of in-person learning.

The OCSD is committed to making this a reality. The first part of this process is to open for five days of in-person instruction for students in Kindergarten–5th grades in the beginning of February. This decision is based on multiple medical and educational studies. Although, we acknowledge that the full effects of COVID-19 and children are not completely known, recent studies suggest that younger children are less likely to contract and seemingly less likely to transmit the virus. This idea has been pioneered in Europe and is being implemented by many districts in the United States, including New York City, the largest district in the nation. Additionally, educational studies have shown that young children are the ones most in need of in-person learning and in-person interactions. Furthermore, for Ocean City, these grades have the lowest number of students per grade and the largest classroom space, which enables us to reopen our K-5 classrooms for those students in our in-person instruction program.

Students in Pre-K, 6th–12th grades will continue following the cohort hybrid-learning model with adjustments to provide more instructional time with teachers. Parents of students in these grades will hear in February as to our plans for 5 days/week in-person instruction. The Pre-K–12th grade students in the OC Virtual Academy will continue to follow their same schedule.

As we work to enact this next phase, we will continue to practice social distancing to the greatest extent possible and benefit from added Plexiglass barriers and other equipment to follow the recommended safety and health guidelines. We also remain prepared to enact targeted quarantines at each of our three schools.

Even with these strategies, however, there are limits to what is operationally possible. One of the most critical variables is the spread of the virus in our community. Evidence shows that when we follow public health guidelines, the community virus transmission rate is driven down. If we can continue to work together to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 in our community, we have a much better chance at reopening all of our schools for five days a week for in-person instruction. Our collective efforts will help fewer people contract the virus or become exposed and required to quarantine, including our educators. We need them to lead our classrooms and schools. However, if the region moves into a very high-risk status for community virus transmission, then we will have to adjust our plans accordingly.

We are all becoming fatigued as we approach a year of navigating COVID-19. Please encourage one another to continue following precautions that keep our community healthy and strong. Open schools certainly add to that strength!

Parents and guardians of students in the Primary and Intermediate schools will receive additional information about OCSD's return to five days of in-person learning, along with a survey, this week.

Thank you for your continued patience and partnership as we navigate the pandemic together and implement new strategies to help our students and staff be successful this year. I personally want to thank all our staff members for their collaboration and commitment to our goal of getting students into school safely. This has not been an easy year for any of us, but our staff's unwavering dedication to our students certainly is a bright spot.

Thank you,

Dr. Kathleen W. Taylor
Superintendent



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