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Dear Parents and Guardians,

It has been two weeks since we opened the district according to our hybrid schedule. The reports and updates I have received from our administrative team are signaling a positive and productive start to our school year, which is something to be celebrated. Our current model certainly is not what we are accustomed to, but our school community has truly come together to make this the best experience possible for our students. I write to you to provide some updates and information regarding the current public health situation as it relates to our schools.

Now that schools are open for all grade levels, some may be wondering if or when the next phase of reopening may occur (i.e. adding more students back for in-person learning). Over the past several weeks we have seen an increase in positive cases across the state and county. I regularly monitor several metrics in order to determine what next steps, if any, would be possible. First, I receive periodic updates from the Hunterdon County Department of Health on the local COVID-19 activity. These reports also coincide with the release of the activity report on the web. This shows the COVID-19 Activity Level Index (CALI) in regions across the state using a color code system: green, yellow, orange, and red. Hunterdon County is in the “Central West” group, which is currently yellow, indicating moderate COVID-19 activity. If in green, we may consider more in-person schooling; however, an activity level falling in red suggests closing school and moving to all-remote learning.

To visit this webpage navigate to: <https://www.nj.gov/health/cd/statistics/covid/>

In addition, the State of New Jersey has developed a COVID-19 Dashboard that details information regarding current cases and trends, hospitals, schools, as well as other indicators. The information on schools is helpful, as we can use this to determine school outbreaks. The outbreaks are a measure of confirmed COVID-19 cases among students and staff in schools where the Department of Health determines transmission is linked to the school setting. The number of positive cases resulting in schools is very low, suggesting that our current school safety measures are helping to reduce the spread of COVID-19.

While I would like to provide dates or a specific timeline for the next phase of reopening, the public health metrics suggest our current protocols are appropriate in greatly reducing transmission. Specifically, wearing masks and maintaining a 6-foot distance are among the two most critical

disease prevention measures in place. More students attending in-person means that the 6-foot distance will not be maintained, which could involve more quarantine or possible school closure if a positive case develops. District administration has begun to plan for the eventual return of more students to in-person learning, but a specific date has not yet been put in place. There is still much to learn about institutional transmission before a more full-capacity operation can begin.

Further, these statistics from the Department of Health suggest that school staff and student adherence to social distancing recommendations are a tangible success of the disease prevention measures in place at school. I urge you to consider these precautions when socializing outside of school. The holidays are approaching and the weather is forcing folks indoors. This may be the time to begin narrowing your circle of contacts outside of school in order to protect yourself from potential transmission. I continue to send the message that this is a public health crisis and requires the public to do their part to stay healthy.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jonathan Hart", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Jonathan Hart, Ph.D.
Superintendent of Schools