

November 12, 2020

Dear Parents, Guardians, and Staff

A sharp increase in community cases of COVID-19 and a trend upward have prompted a serious review of the appropriate response for Newtown Public Schools, including the learning mode that will support the mitigation of infection in our buildings and classrooms. As of the writing of this letter, I received a report of additional COVID cases at Hawley Elementary, Sandy Hook Elementary, Newtown Middle School and Newtown High School. Again, these cases warranted quarantining numerous students and staff. A rise in cases in our own and neighboring communities continues to impact our schools.

First and foremost, our priority is the safety and health of our students and staff, and the decisions we make must take many factors into consideration. In our original Re-Entry Plan, we emphasized the need to prepare for potential changes to our learning model based on the number of cases, staffing issues, and other influences on the operation of our schools.

Therefore, beginning on Monday, November 23rd, we will be placing our K-6 schools (elementary and intermediate) on Hybrid. Both the middle and high school will remain on Hybrid until further notice. We will reassess local health conditions and COVID data following the Thanksgiving holiday. In ongoing consultation with our local and State Department of Public Health, we will continue to examine local information and determine when a safe return to school in full is feasible.

Wednesdays will continue as a shortened schedule for students:

- Remote Learning Wednesday will be a 3-hour early release to reduce screen time for students.
- Students will be expected to follow the 3-hour early release schedule provided by their school and/or teacher.
- In grades K-6, attendance will be taken during homeroom Google Meets.
- Middle and high school will continue to take attendance at the start of each period.

All schools will ensure that students have devices to bring home for use, as needed. Communication regarding school schedules, cohorts, and devices will be sent by building leaders.

While these decisions are not easy, the Hybrid Model still maintains student connections to teachers and classrooms. Additionally, cohorts have been effective in contact tracing and minimizing the number of students or staff who need to quarantine (e.g., possible lack of exposure if a student was not in school due to cohort assignment). A general decrease in the school population is also helpful while we are handling ongoing cases, conducting contact tracing, and trying to fill staffing needs. Both the Newtown Community Center and NYA are again opening their doors for families who need support on specific days.

Please understand that we do not make these decisions without considering staff, students, and families. We want nothing more than to return all students to school and to alleviate the stress that so many staff, students, and families are experiencing. However, we need to consider the overall health, safety, and well-being of all school community members.

Stay well.

Dr. Lorrie Rodrigue, Superintendent