

# SHAMONG TOWNSHIP SCHOOL DISTRICT

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July 21, 2020

Dear Shamong Families,

This letter is to advise you of reopening plans for September. These initial plans were developed after gaining input from the District Committee and Sub-Committees made up of Administration, Board of Education Members, Parents, Teachers, Support Staff, Home & School Association Representatives and local child care providers. The top priority of the planning process is the safety of our students and staff. The planning process is ongoing, and a detailed framework is being formulated for the school year which begins on September 8<sup>th</sup>. As many of you know the New Jersey Department of Education released "The Road Back", guidance for reopening schools, and we are also incorporating guidance from the Center for Disease Control (CDC) and the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), both trusted resources we often consult when making decisions for health-related issues.

Our plan is not final. Every day, we can see that the COVID-19 situation nationwide and in our state, is continually changing and these conditions may affect our plans. Please know this letter is not a complete plan. I am sharing with you what we know today and what you may want to consider as you plan for September. We will release our final plan by August 8<sup>th</sup>.

### WHAT WE KNOW – NOW:

1. The health and safety of our students and staff is our first priority. Our students and staff are the most important part of who we are as a community.
2. The Governor has asked schools to develop a reopening plan that includes modified, in-person instruction. Our plan includes a hybrid of in-person and remote instruction for most students.
4. Some of our families want in-person instruction five full days per week, while others do not want their children to return to our school buildings at all. The sentiment surrounding restarting school is as diverse as the needs of our community. Students rely on schools for academic and social development, as well as food, security, physical activity, and safety
5. COVID-19 policies and decisions are intended to MITIGATE, BUT NOT ELIMINATE, risk. From the AAP, "No single action or set of actions will completely eliminate the risk associated with the virus that causes COVID-19, but implementation of several coordinated interventions can greatly reduce that risk." We intend to implement those coordinated interventions to help keep your children and our staff safe.
6. Based on survey results, we can effectively offer a fully virtual learning program if we are given the directive to move to this model.

### Shamong Schools Re-Opening Plan:

In order to provide you with as much time as possible to make arrangements and prepare for the coming school year, I want to share with you some key points of our reopening plans. **Please understand that these key points do not represent the entire plan and will be more detailed in the plan released by August 8<sup>th</sup>:**

Our Hybrid Plan for return includes:

1. A hybrid schedule, combining in school learning and remote learning experiences, will be developed at the elementary and middle school levels.
  - Students will be assigned to a cohort, so that only half of the students will physically be in the school at a time, for either A day, or B day.
  - The in-person school day will operate on an early dismissal day schedule
  - Students will attend school on the same two days per week (i.e. Monday/Wednesday, Tuesday/Thursday, etc.) and will alternate Fridays (first/third week, second/fourth week, etc.).
2. The A Day/B Day cohorts will be determined by alphabet that will be the same at the elementary and middle school. The alphabet division will be in line with the Seneca High School alpha. cohorts.
3. Certain identified student groups will attend school every day on an early dismissal schedule. These groups contain students in pre-school and self-contained special education classes.
4. Kindergarten students will attend school every day, either in the AM or PM. Information will be sent to Kindergarten Parents regarding your schedule.
5. Students who are not in school on their scheduled day will participate in the remote learning portion of the plan.
6. All students will be provided time to have a snack during the day. The district is asking for this snack to be peanut free.
7. Lunch will not be served in school, but will be available for those who qualify for Free & Reduced Lunch, or whose parents select/pay for lunch that day. All lunches will be on a grab-n-go menu, delivered to classrooms prior to the end of the school day.
8. Before and After Care programs are currently being developed with local day care providers. Details of the programs/providers will be sent once finalized.

We recognize that a modified schedule is a hardship for some families. However, because of the size of our buildings, instructional spaces and hallways, it will be impossible to have a full cohort of students in our buildings at the same time while maintaining safe social distancing. Our schools operate with a wide range of classroom settings, including science labs, small group instruction spaces, and classrooms of various square footage based on age of buildings, and so forth. We will strive to create 6 feet of physical distancing whenever possible; when social distancing is not feasible, students will be required to wear face coverings/masks. Again, accommodations will be made for students with certain medical or other conditions, as identified and verified in writing by a treating physician, which preclude the use of face coverings. We also are planning additional physical spacing measures in classrooms, hallways, and other areas. We will provide time during the day to allow for handwashing, mask "breaks", snack, and physical movement.

Enhanced cleaning, sanitizing, and hygiene protocols will be in place in all of our schools and offices. Hand sanitizer will be available in all classrooms and in high traffic common areas. We will routinely clean high touchpoint areas while taking steps to minimize contact with these areas. Finally, electrostatic misting sprayers will be used to sanitize our playground in between class use and schools every evening.

Transportation is a challenge for a variety of reasons. All students who ride a bus may be required to wear a face covering/mask from the time they are at the bus stop through the duration of their ride to and from school. Please consider whether or not your child will ride a bus to and from school, or if you will secure alternate transportation.

We will develop a procedure/policy and communicate it to you by August 8<sup>th</sup> regarding health screenings for students on a daily basis. A system of “home health check” will be in place so that every parent/guardian is taking the proper precautions to ensure their children have no symptoms prior to boarding a bus or arriving at school. We will require that any child exhibiting symptoms of illness remain home from school. Children who are at home and well enough may participate in the remote learning portion. Please have a working thermometer at home to take your child’s temperature.

The Return to School Plan will be approved by the Shamong Board of Education and the Office of the Burlington County Executive Superintendent of Schools. It is possible that the proposed Return to School Plan might not be feasible if the health conditions in our community change between now and the end of August. If, based upon directives from the Burlington County Department of Health and from the State of New Jersey, the return to school buildings cannot take place in September, the District will implement full virtual at-home instruction. Based on feedback from the Spring and our Virtual Teaching Model we are positive we can implement a robust educational experience for our children.

Our ultimate goal is a full, normal return to school. We will move to this goal when the health conditions indicate it is safe for our students and staff to all be together and we receive all necessary approvals to do so.

All plans will depend upon input, guidance, and direction from the New Jersey and Burlington County Departments of Health and will be reviewed by the local Office of Emergency Management and our school physician.

#### HOW FAMILIES CAN HELP

1. Please begin working on mask or face covering “endurance” with your children by getting reusable/washable face coverings that your child is comfortable wearing and gradually building up the amount of time they can tolerate wearing them. Face shields may be appropriate for those students who have a medical condition or disability that will not allow them to wear a mask. We continue to seek clarification on when a face shield is and is not sufficient. Families should begin identifying the most comfortable face mask options for their child(ren) and practice wearing masks so your child(ren) get used to them. Please choose a mask that is school appropriate.
2. Next, please ensure that you have a working thermometer in your home, to take your child’s temperature. We will communicate additional information in the coming weeks about health and hygiene practices, but these small steps now will help in the fall, regardless of the type of Plan we implement.
3. Please make sure your child has a backpack in which to carry belongings to and from school every day. We will be limiting the sharing of supplies in school. Supply lists will be sent to parents in the coming weeks.

4. You can expect surveys to be sent to gather additional information and seek your input as we continue to develop our plan. Please take time to fill out the surveys so that we have a good representation of our district needs and wants.

I know that this is a lot of information, and I also understand it can be frustrating that our plans are subject to change. This letter is not meant to be comprehensive – we know this is not all of the information you need, but it is a start. Our full plan will address many other issues and considerations with respect to school routines, instruction and assessment, curricular resources, technology support, health and hygiene practices, and more. We will deliver additional information to you by August 8<sup>th</sup>, but I wanted to communicate what information I had to you at this time. At the end of the letter there are links to guiding documents that are being used in developing our plan.

Sincerely,



Dr. Christine Vespe  
Superintendent of Schools

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## Resources

[“The Road Back” Restart and Recovery Plan for Education, New Jersey Department of Education](#)

[Center for Disease Control and Prevention – Guidance for Schools](#)

[Center for Disease Control and Prevention- Childcare](#)