



LITTLE SILVER PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Mr. Michael E. Ettore
Superintendent of Schools
124 Willow Drive, Little Silver, NJ 07739

Tel: 732-741-2188
Fax: 732-741-3644

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Dear Little Silver Families,

Needless to say, the week that just ended was quite hectic and stressful for many reasons. Typically, I would not be spending part of a Saturday writing a letter to all of you, but I felt it was important to give you a sense of how the events from the past week unfolded and also provide you with an update about how we plan to move forward.

The week started with getting the news that at least two more LS students had tested positive for Covid-19. The data collection process took place on Monday and the local health officials were made aware of these developments. Unfortunately, I was not able to formally consult with the health officials until Tuesday morning simply because their office was extremely busy managing cases from several other districts in the county. When I was finally able to consult with the health official responsible for our area, I was told that the recommendation from the Regional Health Commission was to close our schools for fourteen days because of the number of positive cases that were reported and confirmed within such a short time. According to the NJDOH Guidelines, closing a school for fourteen days is recommended if you have two or more unrelated positive cases across multiple grade levels within a fourteen day period. Given that we had four new student cases within seven days, I made the decision to follow the recommendation from the health officials.

Since Tuesday, I have continued to work closely with our administrative team and school nurses to learn more about each case. As new information came to light during the week, I circled back to the local health officials to discuss the possibilities related to our district. In summary, it was agreed that it would be appropriate and safe to take a more differentiated approach towards the individual schools. With regard to PRS, given the number of positive cases that were confirmed in such a short time coupled with a new case that was reported yesterday, it was determined that the decision for that school to remain fully virtual for the remainder of November was the safest course of action at this time. I realize how difficult it is for our youngest students to learn in a virtual manner, which is why our district expanded our reopening efforts as quickly as we did back in early October when we invited all of our K&1 students to return to school four days a week. For that reason, when PRS returns to live learning on Tuesday, December 1, we will resume that same phase 3 approach. For now, I am confident that the PRS teachers will continue to design and provide creative instructional experiences that will engage their students and help them feel connected to one another.

In terms of MPS, the initial decision to have that school go fully remote was based on a smaller number of positive Covid cases and the sibling factor. Although the health officials supported the original decision to close MPS simply as a precaution, they have since agreed that the data points were not as strong as they were at PRS for the closure. After lengthy discussions with the health officials, the Board of Education, the LSEA and the administrative team, it was decided that MPS could safely reopen for live learning starting Tuesday, November 17. The staff is aware of this decision and they are making the necessary plans to welcome MPS students back for live learning as of that date. As a point of emphasis, the change of course for MPS took place with the support and agreement from the local health officials who also shared their latest Covid data with me last night for LS to further confirm this decision as being a safe course of action.



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If there are any MPS parents that feel uneasy with this decision and would prefer to have their child/children remain fully remote for now, then an email request must be sent to Mr. Platt to make him aware of that decision. The district is willing to honor that request for the remainder of the current trimester, which ends on Monday, December 7. After that, families will need to decide if they plan to have their child/children return for live learning as of December 8 or continue to be fully remote for the second trimester.

Looking back on the events of this past week, the original decision to close both schools was made based on the information on hand at the time and also out of an abundance of caution for our staff and students. Moving forward, I will certainly take what I have learned from this series of events and use that knowledge to make future decisions. As we all know, circumstances regarding Covid cases and the spread of the virus can literally change overnight. For that reason, we must remain prepared to quickly move in a different direction when needed. I hope that the decision to reopen MPS earlier than expected demonstrates my willingness to re-examine the facts on hand and continuously consult with the appropriate officials in our area as I make these significant decisions.

Finally, having heard from so many people this past week who have expressed the same concern about the potential for closing one or both schools simply because more positive cases come to the surface, I feel the need to provide a response to everyone. As I stated earlier in this letter, the events from the past week have given me some new insight about how to manage and proceed with these types of circumstances. Just as we saw back in early September, there may be a need to quarantine groups of students or even an entire class due to positive Covid cases. Additionally, if there is a need to completely close one or both schools due to a rapid uptick of positive cases, the decision may be to do so for a period of a few days. That approach would allow for more contact tracing and further investigation to take place before a determination can be made about the possible need to extend the closure for a longer period of time. In a sense, that is what happened this past week.

As I stated to the staff in an email message last night, I look forward to the day when I can serve this community as your Superintendent without having to worry about Covid-19 on a daily basis. For now, we must continue to work together and take consistent precautions to keep our students and staff safe. To that extent, I urge parents to rethink their plans for social gatherings that may include large groups of students. Social situations like this, especially when children are not wearing a mask, are simply not safe. Having a larger number of positive student cases in our schools is no longer hypothetical; it is real. I hope that everyone will keep this in mind when making plans for social events outside of school with friends and family.

Respectfully,

Superintendent