



# LITTLE SILVER PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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Dear Little Silver Families:

I trust that everyone was able to enjoy our recent spring break and get ready for “the home stretch” of the school year. At the beginning of the week, I had the pleasure of visiting both schools to help personally welcome everyone back to their classrooms. Needless to say, it is always wonderful to see our staff and students interacting and full of excitement to be in school together. In addition to the learning taking place in our schools, I am also excited for our students to resume extracurricular activities such as spring sports and the school play that are associated with this time of the year. As usual, my goal for this letter is to provide updates on a few of the topics that will impact our district.

## **State Testing Update**

Each year, students in grades 3-8 participate in State testing (NJSLA) that is typically given to during the months of April or May. Recently, the US Department of Education responded to NJDOE’s assessment waiver request. In that response, the USED stated that *it has determined that, for the 20-21 school year and due to the impact of COVID-19, the Start Strong assessments in ELA, Math, and Science may serve as NJ’s required general assessments in ELA/Math/Science, thus negating the need for a waiver of statewide assessments. Therefore, administration of Spring 2021 NJSLA will be canceled and Start Strong will be administered in Fall 2021.* However, the USED did not waive requirements to administer ACCESS or DLM assessments to certain groups of special needs students. Therefore, ACCESS and DLM administration will occur as originally intended for students in our MD program at MPS. In summary, the State testing that was scheduled to occur for our general education students in grades 3-8 this spring will now take place in the fall. More details and scheduling information regarding State testing will be shared at a later date.

## **Board of Education Meetings**

Aside from the typical “regular” monthly Board meeting, there are times when “special” meetings are scheduled. This took place on April 6th for the purpose of hiring an Interim and a full-time Business Administrator since our current BA will be leaving the district as of April 23rd. The next “special” meeting is scheduled for April 22nd. The purpose of that meeting is to conduct the annual staff review, which has to take place in Executive Session in order to keep the discussion confidential. All Board meetings (special or regular) must be advertised and include a public discussion section on the agenda. However, the more appropriate time for community members to participate in the public discussion portion of the agenda is during the regular, monthly meeting. The next regular meeting is scheduled for 7:00 p.m. on April 29th.

## **Reopening Status Update**

The final topic in need of an update is the reopening status for our district. Overall, our current schedule is working well in terms of providing students with the opportunity to receive all of their instruction in person. However, the ultimate goal all along this year has been to return our schools to their regular, full-day schedules. In a previous letter, I outlined the data points that the administration and Covid Team have been monitoring for the eventual return to full days. Given that one of those data points was focused



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on our staff having the ability to get vaccinated, I am happy to report that a large number of teachers and support staff have been fully vaccinated. This is critical given that our local transmission rate continues to be an area of concern.

During the March Board meeting, I commented on the logistics that were being discussed and considered by the administrative team to make a safe transition to phase 4 (full days). The remaining obstacle in our plan is being able to effectively manage and supervise student lunch and recess time. As I stated during the last Board meeting, the eventual transition to phase 4 would likely involve students eating lunch in their classrooms in order to avoid large, indoor gatherings. In order to make this work, both schools need an increased level of adult supervision. In an effort to address this piece of the puzzle, a posting was created and sent to the community prior to spring break that specifically focused on hiring additional lunch aids. I am grateful to those community members that have already responded to the posting, but overall, we have not received the type of response we had hoped for. As a result, the posting was recently extended. My intention is to ask the Board to approve all of our new lunch aids at the April 29th BOE meeting. Provided that we have an adequate level of supervision available, we hope to transition one or both schools to phase 4 during the month of May. The earliest possible date for this transition would be Monday, May 10th, but that depends on having an adequate level of supervision for lunch and recess. Since we currently have fewer vacancies to fill at PRS, it is possible for that school to move to phase 4 sooner than MPS. Knowing that we only need 3-4 more lunch aides to staff PRS, my hope is that those remaining spots will soon be filled. It is important to keep in mind that all applicants for this position must complete the background and fingerprinting process to be approved for employment, so the sooner this starts, the sooner we will be able to finalize our plans for phase 4.

From the public discussion during the last two Board meetings, it was clear that there is a growing level of frustration on the part of many parents in our community who have a strong desire to have our schools operating on full days. Being able to progressively restore more normalcy has been the goal of our administration and teaching staff all year long, which is why I am proud of the progress our district has made since September. I believe we have taken a safe and responsible course of action this year while reaching the point where we are now operating on a schedule that provides the opportunity for a full instructional day in all core subjects and related arts classes. Looking ahead, I am confident that we will be ready to take our last step by transitioning to phase 4 as soon as we have the appropriate level of support and supervision in place. Our community has done an amazing job of pulling together to face every challenge that has come our way this year, so I trust that will continue now that we are so close to our ultimate goal.

Respectfully,

Michael E. Ettore  
Superintendent of Schools