

Newton Public Schools

57 Trinity Street ♦ Newton, NJ 07860-1831

973-383-7392 phone ♦ 973-383-5378 fax

www.newtonnj.org

*Dr. G. Kennedy Greene
Superintendent*

*Ms. Donna Snyder-DeVita
Interim Business Administrator*

November 20, 2020

Newton Public Schools Community:

In consultation with the Sussex County Department of Health (DOH) and our local school district partners, the Newton Public Schools are announcing the following changes to our instructional programs:

1. **All grade pK-12 students will move to fully remote instruction from Monday November 23, 2020, through Monday January 18, 2021.** Reopening to hybrid and in-person instruction will be reconsidered in mid-January based on health data provided by the New Jersey and Sussex County DOH.
2. The school buildings will remain open for custodial, maintenance, and security work as well as for instructional staff who prefer to use school resources. The schools will be staffed per our Restart and Recovery Plan. Staff members, by their choice and with parent permission, may be working in-person with selected at-risk students per their individual needs.
3. Athletic and extracurricular activities will not meet or practice in-person starting November 23 through January 18. Teams and clubs will interact remotely based on schedules provided by their coaches and advisors. The C2C afterschool program for participants in grades 3-8 will also operate remotely.
4. The school district will not approve external requests for use of the facilities during this period of time.
5. Meals can be picked up at the Newton High School Cafeteria as they currently are on Mondays and Thursdays from 2:15-4:15 pm.

We are experiencing a community-wide, exponential increase in positive COVID-19 cases. This transition to fully remote instruction is intended to reduce the spread of the virus and allow health officials to effectively and efficiently identify cases, trace contacts, and quarantine individuals. We are relying on science and data to drive our decision making. Here is an update as to where the situation stands today:

- The New Jersey DOH COVID-19 Activity Level Report was released yesterday and showed our northwest region and 4 out of the 5 other regions of the state in the “high risk” level as of November 14, 2020.
- The state’s public health recommendations affirm that schools remaining open in “high risk” regions need to now exclude close contacts with staff or students who are “suspected” cases (meaning they have COVID-19 symptoms such as cough, headache, runny nose, sore throat). Schools would have to send home anyone who has these symptoms to quarantine for 10 days pending a negative test or alternate diagnosis *and also every close contact of that person for 14 days.*
- Given what is presently happening in our community and what can be anticipated during the holiday season, this will lead to an inability to run our in-person and hybrid instructional programs.
- The Sussex County average daily COVID-19 cases was 7 in mid-October, 34 last week, and is expected to be 55-60 this week based on DOH projection.
- As a result of this data, the county DOH predicts we are moving into, if not already in, the “very high risk” category. Their health-based recommendation is for all schools to move to fully remote instruction now.
- The county DOH is also overwhelmed with contact tracing. Testing labs are bogged down by increased requests too, resulting in data coming in slowly to the county health database.
- Our school district has seen continually increasing numbers of positive COVID-19 tests among students and staff members since the beginning of November.

We understand the difficulty this decision causes for families. The health and well-being of our students, staff, and the entire school community are of the utmost importance to us.

School administrators will be reaching out with building-specific information as we move into fully remote instruction. If you have individual concerns with any aspect of these changes, please feel free to reach out to me or a member of your school’s administrative staff.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "GK Greene". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Dr. G. Kennedy Greene