

Newton Public Schools
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Dr. G. Kennedy Greene
Superintendent

Donna Snyder-DeVita
Interim Business Administrator

To: Board of Education
From: Dr. G. Kennedy Greene
Date: December 22, 2020
Re: Progress Report on the District Goals & Action Plan

1. Goal #1: Reopen and operate our schools safely for students and staff members in accordance with public health standards to increase student achievement.
 - a. Develop a district restart and recovery plan that meets all required NJDOE health and safety standards.
 - i. Held a series of four meetings beginning on June 25 with 22 staff representatives with diverse job roles from each school and program area to serve on two district reopening committees on Health, Safety & Facilities and Instruction & Technology. The committees' task was to coordinate the development and implementation of their restart and recovery plans.
 - ii. Sent a letter on June 30 to all staff and families to begin to identify key points for reopening and to announce that surveys would be sent to all parents, staff, and middle/high school students to gather input for the district plan (surveys were sent on July 6). The letter was posted publicly on the district website and through social media.
 - iii. Following a public presentation on July 28, the Board of Education discussed and approved [the district Restart and Recovery Plan](#), which was then shared publicly on the district website, social media, and superintendent's email/letter to all staff and families along with an [executive summary](#) and [slide presentation](#).
 - iv. Updated and reapproved the district Restart and Recovery Plan on [August 25](#) and [November 24](#).
 - b. Develop a policy that implements the approved health and safety standards.
 - i. Developed [Policy 1648 entitled "Restart and Recovery Plan"](#) during the summer with Board approval on second reading on August 25.
 - c. Develop and implement procedures for maintaining healthy environments per the approved health and safety standards.
 - i. Published and distributed updated cleaning and sanitizing procedures to custodial staff.
 - ii. Nurses and superintendent met multiple times through the summer to develop protocols for implementing health-related procedures.
 - iii. Ordered PPE and other health-related supplies such as air purifiers, physical barriers, message signs, sanitizing stations, etc.

- d. Provide staff training on all health and safety protocols.
 - i. [Modified schedules](#) to arrange four in-service days for staff prior to the start of the school year. Health and safety protocols were a major focus during this time.
 - ii. Custodians received specific training on cleaning and sanitizing techniques from the product distributor.
 - iii. Developed cleaning and sanitizing protocols in conjunction with school staff and distributed prior to student entry.
 - e. Provide specific instruction to health-trained assistants for conducting daily health screenings and helping with health-related tasks.
 - i. Newly hired assistants received professional training on health-related tasks from the school nurses.
 - f. Monitor implementation of the approved health and safety standards and address implementation challenges.
 - i. Nurses and superintendent met weekly in August to assess the implementation of health-related procedures.
 - ii. [Announced on August 28](#) that due to circumstances that delayed the ability to implement several health and safety standards, the school year would start on fully remote instruction as of September 8 and remain so through October 2.
 - iii. Held administrative meetings multiple times per week during the months of August and September to troubleshoot implementation issues.
 - g. Maintain regular contact with county health officials regarding updated health information.
 - i. School nurses are the point of contact with the county health department and work collaboratively with school administration to address COVID-related illnesses.
 - ii. Superintendent meets weekly with county health officials and other superintendents to review health data and discuss potential actions.
2. Goal #2: Strengthen student-centered learning through robust options for hybrid and remote instruction to increase student achievement.
- a. Develop school-level procedural appendices to the district plan that articulate three hybrid and remote scheduling options being offered to families.
 - i. On July 8, the principals began to hold regular meetings with their staff members to provide school-level input to the district plan, particularly in the area of instructional programming and scheduling.
 - ii. On August 14, the principals sent their families [details on building-level procedures](#) to implement the district plan (posted on the district website as well).
 - b. Standardize the use of digital applications that augment the district standards provided in Google Suite for Education.
 - i. Faculty committees recommended and the district purchased Canvas as an additional learning management system, Zoom as an additional meeting platform, and SchoolInfoApp as an additional communication application.
 - ii. Other well-established and approved instructional resources (e.g., iReady, GoGuardian,

Nearpod, ClassDojo) have continued to be used and supported at certain grade levels.

- c. Identify and address the needs of students in special populations who may benefit from a greater portion of in-person instruction than their peers or other academic interventions.
 - i. Prior to in-person instruction opening on October 5 and during the move to fully remote instruction after November 20, special populations were prioritized for early in-person instruction.
 - ii. The High School hybrid schedule was set up purposely to address the needs of special populations and struggling students with more intensive in-person opportunities.
 - d. Provide accelerated professional development to educators focusing on pedagogical aspects and lesson planning for hybrid and remote instruction tailored to the educational technology used.
 - i. Offered free summer reading choices to staff on topics such as creating active learning experiences, culturally responsive teaching, orchestrating productive mathematics discussions, differentiated instruction in a digital world, the power of inquiry, achieving equity and excellence, connecting around shared interests, what video games can teach us about learning and literacy, critical digital pedagogy, rethinking how to teach struggling writers, cultivating emotional resilience, the power of passion and perseverance, having discussions about race, being unconventional, and parent engagement strategies.
 - ii. Created a Google Classroom for staff development currently with 56 modules on topics such as remote instruction, social-emotional learning, anti-racist education, equity, mental health, technology integration, and teaching tolerance.
 - e. Provide training opportunities using live and recorded means on topics identified by parents and students such as instructional strategies; student centered learning; online tools; and digital citizenship.
 - i. Developed a [series of tutorials](#) for students, parents, and families around supporting virtual learning to ease the stress of remote instruction, technology tools, digital citizenship and more.
 - f. Develop curriculum planning to go beyond state mandates and promote school-level goals related to hybrid and remote instruction.
 - i. Reported [school goals and action plans](#) on October 27, which articulate a variety of curricular and instructional adaptations given hybrid and remote instruction
3. Goal #3: Promote equity in access to services and resources for vulnerable children and their families to increase student achievement.
- a. Prioritize student social, emotional, and mental health, especially during the transition back to school.
 - i. Halsted guidance is meeting with representatives from Rutgers University PBSIS to plan and create a broad based lesson for the entire student body focusing on "Self Wellness and Taking Care of Yourself".
 - ii. Merriam support staff is providing both individual and group counseling to students. Through the utilization of their identification tools, the staff is currently running three additional groups to meet the needs of our students.
 - iii. All School Safety-Climate Teams continue to meet and execute initiatives that provide support and a sense of normalcy: Holiday Sweater Extravaganza (NHS); Virtual Pet Show (NHS); Partnering with Center for Prevention and Counseling social/emotional groups

(HMS); Small group mindfulness/yoga (MAS); Book club focusing on SEL topics (MAS); SEL lessons at all levels.

- b. Fight stigma by supporting people who are coming back to school or work after completing quarantine or isolation period for COVID-19 exposure or illness.
 - i. District notices of positive cases were all sent without identifying individuals or even whether the person was a student or staff member.
 - ii. Those positive cases and close contacts needing to quarantine were transitioned immediately and confidentially to fully remote instruction.
- c. Provide training opportunities using live and recorded means on topics identified by parent and students such as personal mental health/self care (e.g., grief, loss, trauma, preparedness, hope, resilience); student mental health, SEL, and supportive behaviors; and HIB vs. conflict (e.g., bias, prejudice, stigma).
 - i. Offered free virtual sessions to all families on [September 23 and 30](#) on self-care, understanding stress, and social-emotional learning.
 - ii. Posted [a guide to state resources](#) from the Department of Human Services.
 - iii. Created and posted [a webpage for parents and students entitled "Pandemic Resources"](#) with links to a variety of resources on financial/economic hardship, social-emotional and mental health, stress management, and academic assistance.
 - iv. Sent over [two dozen announcements since before the pandemic to parents and families](#) with information on health-related topics, food distribution, mental health resources, training opportunities, and human services in addition to closure and scheduling notices.
- d. Engage families in social-emotional learning by sharing resources, partnering with local agencies, and offering parent support groups.
 - i. Offered free virtual sessions to all families on [September 23 and 30](#) on self-care, understanding stress, and social-emotional learning.
 - ii. Created and posted [a webpage for parents and students entitled "Pandemic Resources"](#) with links to a variety of resources on financial/economic hardship, social-emotional and mental health, stress management, and academics.
 - iii. Sent over [two dozen announcements from before the pandemic to parents and families](#) with information on health-related topics, food distribution, mental health resources, training opportunities, and human services in addition to closure and scheduling notices.
 - iv. Partnered with Zufall to offer family programs through Snap-Ed. The first program, MyPlate, was scheduled on November 18th and provided sessions in English and Spanish.
- e. Participate in a consortium of school districts to promote student excellence through equity with a focus this year on leadership for reimagining schools.
 - i. Newton is a founding member district of the [Northwest NJ Consortium for Excellence Through Equity](#).
 - ii. Members of the administrative team have taken part in five work sessions thus far focusing on leadership for reimagining schools through plans to encourage innovation and equity and on instruction for in-person, blended, and virtual environments.
 - iii. These sessions are intended to inform post-pandemic planning for our school programs.