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Superintendent

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August 5, 2020

Dear Pennsbury School District Community,

The beginning of the school year is always filled with jitters for students and staff alike. It is the one thing about starting the 2020-2021 school year that feels normal; however, as we know, this year will continue to see changes to education that we have considered to be the norm. We will continue to navigate these changes together. We are truly all in this together, and I am extremely appreciative of the Pennsbury support, encouragement and commitment to keep safety and student success in focus. We will continue to do our best to strike the appropriate balance for both.

I wanted to provide an update regarding the District's reopening efforts and decisions that have been made on, and since, the School Board Action Meeting on Thursday, July 30th. It is probably best to start with key dates for the upcoming school year, and if you have the time and interest, you can continue reading about the details behind these decisions.

Key Dates

August 3, 2020 - Athletes may begin conditioning and practice, as feasible;

September 8, 2020 - Remote/Virtual classes begin for majority of students; In-person instruction begins for specialized learners whose families opt-in for these services;

October 5, 2020 - This is the tentative date for return to schools for students whose families opt-in to the hybrid learning plan; The remainder of the students continue with remote learning until the second semester.

Athletic Healthy and Safety Plan

I'll begin with the easier of the topics, although maintaining the safety of our student-athletes is no easy task. Thanks to deliberate internal discussions, as well as participation in discussion across Bucks County amongst superintendents, principals and athletic directors, the plan [linked here](#) was approved unanimously. To best understand it, recognize that fall sports have been identified as having either a high, moderate or low risk of transmitting coronavirus particles, as follows:

MISSION

Recognizing our proud traditions and diverse community, the Pennsbury School District prepares all students to become creative, ethical, and critical thinkers for lifelong success in a global society.

Level of Risk	Fall Sports
Low Risk	<i>Examples:</i> Cross Country, Golf, Sideline Cheer (Fall)
Moderate Risk	<i>Examples:</i> Field Hockey, Soccer, Tennis, Volleyball
High Risk	<i>Examples:</i> Football

Additionally, the first three weeks covers two phases of acclimation.

- Phase 1 (August 3rd through August 7th)
- Phase 2 (August 10th through August 21st)

Each label of risk comes with varying allowances for when training/conditioning; practice and competition can begin in this phased approach. For now, the Board has approved training, conditioning and practice as follows:

Phase 1: August 3-7 (1 week)	Phase 2: August 10-21 (2 weeks)
Low Risk: Practice	Low Risk: Practice
Moderate Risk: Modified Practice Only	Moderate Risk: Practice Only
High Risk: Conditioning	High Risk: Non-Contact Practice

There remains significant concern about high risk competitions (i.e.: football). The plan above allows the Board to consider conditions the next three weeks before their meeting on August 20th. At that time, they can decide whether to approve moving beyond Phase 2 and allow competitions to begin for each or all levels of risk.

Continuity of Education Plan

As previously shared, our team has also worked intensely on all matters pertaining to reopening schools. This was evident in our presentations to the Board of School Directors on July 28th and July 30th. Both of these presentations, as well as additional resources, can be located on the Pennsbury Reopening Resources webpage that can be accessed by clicking on the appropriate link in the red banner on the top of the District's homepage at <https://www.pennsburyisd.org/>.

Through refinement of the initial ideas shared in my community correspondence dated July 16th, the administration has planned to offer any of the three instructional delivery models in the graphic found [here](#) and outlined below:

Traditional In-School Learning Plan

- All students in school every day.
- Pennsbury curricula will be used.
- Student work will be graded using regular grading procedures.
- Classrooms are arranged to provide maximum distance between desks (i.e.: 3 feet or more).
- When furniture & space permits, desks/seats will face the same direction.
- Masks will need to be worn during change of classes at all levels and when 6 feet of social distance cannot be maintained.

Hybrid Learning Plan

(2 days per week in-person & 3 days at home for remote work completion)

- This plan **reduces the number of students in classrooms, hallways and on buses.**
- It ensures **meaningful connections** between teachers and students.
- **Students are divided into two groups**, with approximately half coming to school on Mondays and Wednesdays and the other half coming to school on Tuesdays and Thursdays.
- Students will remain **at home on Fridays for remote instruction**. This will be a **combination of live support (synchronous) and independent work (asynchronous)**.
- Certain **student populations with specific educational needs could potentially attend more frequently**. This is being handled directly by our Special Education Department staff and those families.
- Classrooms are arranged to provide **maximum distance between desks** (i.e.:6 ft).
- When furniture and space permits, desks/seats will face the same directions.
- Masks will need to be worn during change of classes at all levels and when 6 feet of social distance cannot be maintained.
- The teachers would manage **content delivery using developmentally-appropriate learning management platform**.
 - Grades 6-12 will utilize Canvas.
 - Grades K-5 will utilize Google Classroom.
- There will be an expectation for professional staff to provide **weekly synchronous instructional opportunities**, especially on Friday.

Full Remote Learning Plan

Students remain at home full time and participate in remote instruction.

- This will be **led by a Pennsbury teacher** and will include **synchronous (live video-instruction) with asynchronous (self-paced)** activities plus regularly **scheduled virtual office hours** when students will receive assistance from a teacher and/or additional staff members.
- Students will engage in virtual learning from home with instruction and support from a Pennsbury teacher.
- There will be a dramatic increase in the amount of **live teaching with set times** for direct engagement in a virtual class setting.
- Set office hours will be established for students to **receive additional support** from a **teacher and/or additional staff members**.
- Teachers will utilize **rigorous, standards-aligned Pennsbury curricula** which should ease any transition back to face-to-face instruction.
- The teachers would manage delivery of Pennsbury curricula using **developmentally-appropriate learning management platforms**:
 - Grades 6-12 will utilize Canvas.
 - Grades K-5 will utilize Google Classroom.
- Purchase of **additional digital resources** to support virtual learning is planned.
- **Assessments and teacher feedback** will continue to be a regular part of learning and coordinate with the **current Pennsbury grading system**.
- Student participation and attendance is mandatory and expected for all days and classes when in session.
- Students will continue to have **access to all aspects of being a student** (activities, sports, clubs).
- Students with specialized learning needs will be afforded a team meeting to **address the potential need for specially-designed supports**.
- **Use of a District-issued device** will be provided, if needed.

Administrative Recommendation

The administrative team recommended starting the year on September 8, 2020 remotely/virtually for all students. The reasons for this are plenty as there are significant challenges to setting up the hybrid option for families who elect this option including:

- Matching approximately 10,000 students with approximately 850 professional staff members in 2 educational platforms.
- Potentially revising over 2,200 IEPs, plus 504 considerations
- Ensuring all components of Health & Safety Plan are securely in place
- Designing transportation runs as necessary
- Potentially needing to fill multiple staff vacancies
- Transitioning four key central-level leadership positions
 - (Facilities, Special Education, Technology, Transportation)

Despite the challenges, our team will survey families beginning later this week as to which option they prefer: Hybrid Learning Plan or Full Remote Learning Plan. The infographic [linked here](#) may help families visualize these options. This will help us plan in two ways. It will help us determine how many Pennsbury staff members we need to support the Full Remote model. Additionally, it will help us determine how many staff members we need for the hybrid model and consider spacing issues associated with a safe reopening of physical locations.

A transition opportunity to in-person instruction may be offered to families for the second semester. So, when a family is choosing the option, they should select it for as though it may be for the full year; however, it may be possible to have families who opt into the hybrid model to start the year to transition into the full remote model for the second semester. Any transitions will be dependent on the conditions at that time and the availability of staff in either model to support movement of students. Currently, the administration is contemplating surveying all families again in November to see if people are comfortable in their learning environment or if they desire a switch. More information on this will be available at a later date.

Board Decision

The Board of School Directors approved opening schools in a full remote/virtual environment for the majority of students beginning September 8, 2020. Students will receive more information in the coming weeks regarding class schedules and instructors.

The Board of School Directors also accepted the administration's recommendation to delay implementing the hybrid learning plan for families that select such until October 5, 2020. In essence, students who opt into the hybrid model will begin virtually throughout September and transition back into schools physically on a part-time basis at the beginning of October. It should be recognized, again, that this remains dependent upon changing conditions related to COVID-19 and any additional measures the Board may need to take to protect the health and safety of students and staff, which could further delay the transition to a hybrid learning plan.

Last, the Board of School Directors, out of concern for our students with specialized learning needs, approved starting in-person instruction for students with individualized education plans (i.e.: IEPs) and Section 504 Plans from the American Disabilities Act beginning the week of September 8, 2020. Based upon varying levels of need, families with students who qualify for educational support services have been sent a survey this week to consider in-person options.

Next Steps

We have been working around the clock to execute the direction provided to us. The survey to families with students who have specialized learning needs went out at

the start of this week. The survey to all families will be sent to families by the end of this week. We plan to once again survey our staff members at the end of this week about their intentions and desires as we head into the school year, so we can staff multiple educational options.

The Transportation Department will begin planning routes in earnest once we know which students will begin September 8th and those that desire the hybrid model beginning October 5th. This information will be shared with families closer to the child's start date.

We will begin working closely with our food service partners, The Nutrition Group, to ensure meals are available in a safe manner for school occupants. We will also once again plan to support families with food insecurities as we did during the emergency school closure this past spring.

There are numerous other planning efforts required, but I wanted to share some of the high priorities. I look forward to communication with you all in the near future to update you on our progress, and I look forward to restarting the educational journey with the students next month. Until then, please stay safe and well.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "William J. Gretzula". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

William J. Gretzula, Ed. D.
District Superintendent
Pennsbury School District