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# **Menands Union Free School District**



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July 31, 2020

Dear Menands Families:

I wanted to share the latest information relative to our reopening planning. Though it will remain "fluid" and a work in progress, our initial reopening plan has been submitted to both the New York State Education Department (NYSED) and the New York State Department of Health (NYSDOH), as required.

I would like to thank everyone who contributed to the development of the plan, including faculty, staff, our transportation providers, our BOCES Health and Safety Specialist, and parents. We were able to include all parents who responded to the June 26<sup>th</sup> invitation to be part of the conversation. We also received significant feedback from our parent survey with over 130 responses. The contributions and insight from all involved has, and will continue to be been invaluable.

As is required, we have planned for onsite, remote and hybrid (a combination of both) instruction. As I shared in my July 17 update, the Governor has established metrics under which schools would be reopened, and will make his initial decision after the first week of August.

Our situation is unique, compared to other districts; being a K-8 school/district, as well as the completion of significant additions and renovations over the past two years, provide us some advantage and opportunities.

The plan in its entirety can be accessed at the following link:

<https://www.menands.org/menands-reopening-plan-for-the-2020-21-school-year/>

Though a bit lengthy I share the following components which address the most frequent feedback and questions to date.

From an instructional perspective:

- We are positioned to bring back all students (K-8) for onsite and in person instruction, in accordance with CDC guidance.
- In order to adequately prepare, both programmatically and logistically for the school year (including but not limited to having adequate staffing levels and allocation of spaces to accommodate recommended social distancing) parents will be asked to make decisions relative to their preferred method of instruction, in person or remote, by a certain date. That date will be set based on the Governor's initial decision around reopening. A subsequent decision to revert to the other option will also be bound by certain parameters; at present it is anticipated this will be by trimester for K-5 students and by semester at grades 6-8.

- Classroom spaces have been reconfigured to allow for adequate social distancing (6 feet) between students and teachers. Masks would be worn regularly, with time provided for “mask breaks”, under the guidance and direction of staff, as needed and as developmentally appropriate.
- The schedule that has been drafted will modify the school day, and includes staggered start and end times, with K-5 arriving first, followed by 6-8, and the reverse for departure 6-8 leaving first and K-5 to follow. This is to address logistical and health and safety needs, but also be responsive to concerns raised by parent, which include the following:
  - Staggering arrival and dismissal will allow for adequate social distancing on the bus and during entry into and departure from the building.
  - We know there are parents and families who rely on our middle school students to get younger siblings on and off the bus; this schedule allows for that.
  - The schedule as drafted allows for a more seamless transition, in the event of a subsequent closure and the need to move to totally remote instruction.
  - Similarly it lends itself more readily to provide instruction to students who will be unable to return to a physical setting.
- The 6 – 8 middle school schedule, will operate on an alternating day basis, with periods 1 -4 on one day, alternating with periods 5 – 8 on the opposite day; those class periods will be longer than in the traditional 8 period schedule.
- Students who are supported through our district’s special education program will receive instruction consistent with their individualized education plan (IEP). Instruction will be provided via onsite, hybrid, or remote instruction. All of the modifications and accommodations afforded to special education students via their IEP will be afforded to students regardless of their primary instructional model.
- Though the delivery might look a bit different, onsite we are able to provide all special area classes (music, art, library, PE and Spanish in most cases), and anticipate being able to do so to the extent possible, in a remote environment as well.
- Whenever possible, students will utilize outside space for physical education instruction. We will adhere to recommended social distancing guidance between students when engaging in physical activity.
- To maximize safety, and minimize exposure, students will remain primarily in their classrooms, and teachers will move to them (what some of the guidance refers to as “pods”). Similarly the students will remain in their classrooms for lunch, avoiding large group gatherings.
- Regardless of the mode of instruction (onsite, remote or hybrid) breakfast and lunch will continue to be available to students daily.
- The start and end times have yet to be finalized, as it is contingent on a number of moving parts. We recognize this is important information for parents to be able to plan, and anticipate having that firmed up and be able to share by the end of next week.
- We know we have parents who rely on “after care”, and recognize a modified school day may increase that need. We have a meeting scheduled with Y-Time (the YMCA program we have historically utilized) to discuss options for our families, and additional information will be forthcoming.
- Based on the feedback received regarding remote instruction last year, the district has enhanced technology available to support synchronous (real time) learning and “face to face time with teachers.
- Professional development has and will continue to be provided to staff during the summer so they are able to effectively plan, develop and provide remote instruction.

- Similarly, we are in the process of developing resources that parents and families can have available to them to assist them in a better understanding of the platforms being used by teachers, and their children.
- For the first trimester, the district will suspend after school sports and club offerings. This will be revisited and subsequent decisions made prior to the start of each new trimester.
- Given the experiences of the past few months, along with a number of changes and still much uncertainty, social emotional wellbeing of students and staff has been at the forefront of our thinking during the planning process. To that end, the opening days and weeks of the school year, will be dedicated to assessing student wellbeing and building relationships with students and families.

From a facility/health & safety perspective, I share the following:

- We have worked closely with our BOCES Health & Safety Specialist around enhanced cleaning protocols and to obtain needed quantities of PPE for students and staff.
- That same individual has developed and provided relevant training to 12 month staff, and will be doing the same for 10 month teaching staff. She will also assist in the development of explicit instructional materials that will be used to help students understand and implement necessary protocols and precautions (this instruction will be developed so they are delivered in a developmentally appropriate manner).
- In accordance with NYSED and NYSDOH guidance, we will use an electronic application in coordination with parents and families, to accomplish and verify temperature checks for students before they board the bus or arrive at school. More detailed information in this regard will be forthcoming.

Though the reopening plan was developed thoughtfully, and is comprehensive, reopening will certainly be very different, and classrooms our students arrive to in the fall, will be far different than they were in a pre-COVID-19 environment. Our priority has been to provide substantive instruction for all students with great attention to the health and safety of students and staff.

In addition to the link to the full plan, provided earlier in this document, I share the following additional resources:

NYSED Guidance: <http://www.nysed.gov/news/2020/state-education-department-issues-guidance-reopen-new-york-state-schools>

#### NYSDOH School Re-opening

Guidance: [https://www.governor.ny.gov/sites/governor.ny.gov/files/atoms/files/Pre-K to Grade 12 Schools MasterGuidance.pdf](https://www.governor.ny.gov/sites/governor.ny.gov/files/atoms/files/Pre-K%20to%20Grade%2012%20Schools%20MasterGuidance.pdf)

We will be scheduling an opportunity for a virtual parent's forum, the date will be announced next week. We will continue to keep you informed as new information becomes available. Please feel free to contact me via email: [mlong@menands.org](mailto:mlong@menands.org), or via phone (518) 465-4561 ext. 101.

Sincerely,



Dr. Maureen A. Long  
Superintendent of Schools