



# Ridgefield Public Schools

*...valuing each and every student*

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Superintendent of Schools

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Dear Members of the Ridgefield Community:

We hope everyone is doing well and has been able to enjoy the summer during these extraordinarily challenging times. We understand many of you have been frustrated with the ever-changing guidance we have seen on school reopening plans, virtual graduations, athletics, etc. over the past several months. It goes without saying that we share your frustrations.

Nonetheless, we need to make you aware that after the most careful thought and deliberation, as we are seeing in many other districts, the Ridgefield School District must make the difficult decision to start the year remotely/virtually for all students for **Marking Period 1**, despite our initial reopening plan. It has become clear that realistically, for the safety of students and staff, the District will not be able to facilitate our Option A Hybrid approach on September 8th for the following reasons:

- The District is committed to supporting staff members who have an extenuating medical circumstance and cannot physically return to work safely. However, at this point we (A) cannot ensure enough coverage to also provide for adequate supervision of students, and (B) cannot open schools without certain staff members who are essential to doing so because of their roles.
- Delays beyond our control have caused the District to still not receive internal and external signage, certain PPE, hand sanitizer stations, and temperature-check kiosks that were ordered, all of which were included in our reopening plan and much of which are required to be compliant in meeting the New Jersey Department of Education's standards.

The District's initial Reopening Plan was developed by Pandemic Response Teams at each building and a District Restart Committee made up of various stakeholders, and represented the best plan we could develop in spite of ever-changing guidance from the New Jersey Department of Education. This guidance directed schools to meet "Anticipated Minimum Standards" for minimizing risk for students and staff when returning to school.

Despite this, roughly 50% of parents chose Option B in our plan, which might have been expected based on the fact that 66% of parents in our previous survey indicated a "high" to "moderate" level of fear for their own children's physical safety from COVID-19 if required to return to school – it's clear we have a wide range of perspectives on this in our community, which one can certainly understand.

But, the safety of students and staff must always be our highest priority, and simply put, we do not have the staffing resources and equipment to ensure this right now. Therefore, the District will have to start the school-year all remote/virtual for Marking Period 1 at this point.

You will be receiving more information about our remote/virtual learning schedule from your building principal shortly, as well as information about picking up your child's individual Chromebook, and completing forms in the District *Genesis* Parent Portal.

Rest assured, however, that students will be receiving daily, consistent, live instruction from teachers this year as we build upon and improve our ability to facilitate virtual teaching and learning, and that we will be able to answer more questions soon about athletics, extracurriculars, etc. This may be the most important school-year many of your children have, and we are committed to ensuring they receive the world-class education they deserve, regardless of the circumstances.

Again, we sincerely apologize for the inconvenience this will cause many of you and appreciate your understanding in advance as we make decisions in the best interests of the safety of students and staff in this ongoing public health crisis.

Sincerely,

*Mr. Rory McCourt*

Superintendent of Schools

*Dr. Letizia Pantoliano*

Interim Superintendent of Schools