



August 11, 2020

Dear Parents/Guardians of the Rumson School District,

I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for your support and the many kind words sent to our administration as we navigate this reopening plan. Such sentiments certainly energize our work and efforts. We also know that even with such goodwill, a finer focus on the first days of school can stir many feelings that give us all pause. Some of us handle this by wanting to reestablish normalcy and more established patterns, while others of us take a higher degree of caution and trepidation as we approach the post-Labor Day world. Herein lies the friction of developing a reopening plan, and it reflects the need for three modes: giving our families some level of assurance and resilience no matter what the conditions of the day present.

While none of us love the fact that we must have a plan like this, the District feels strongly the plan we have developed is in the best interest of the children of Rumson. It might be easier to think of this plan as a "soft opening." We have in place the components for success: a thorough plan developed with thoughtful input from parents, staff, local health experts, state guidance, and academic professionals; contingency options; and the infrastructure enhancements to allow students to return to full-in person schooling as quickly as is safe and feasible to do so.

We must remember, however, is that it is indeed *just a plan*. And any oversubscription to one particular plan recalls poet Robert Burns's most famous stanza: "The best-laid plans of mice and men/ go oft awry." To this end, it would be prudent and responsible of us to ensure the measures we have in place are as effective as possible whatever the coming months may hold for us. A "soft opening" – with a lower capacity of students in the building – ensures our operations and virtual programming are as effective as possible. In addition, done this way, we can be confident and prepared for the other two modes.

In the event we need to move to Mode C/Full Virtual – and there is still talk at the state level of beginning that way as I write – opening school in Hybrid mode allows us to evaluate our staff's considerable work and professional development over the summer during virtual days over the first few weeks in September. No one wants to return to a situation like this past spring, but should that become warranted, we want to ensure even more reliable and effective virtual pedagogy.

To be clear, Mode C is not our goal here...nor is Mode B for that matter. Planned renovations from the first referendum phase, as well as the need to both evaluate and acquire all the infrastructure enhancements to meet state guidelines for full classrooms, have made opportunities to "pre-test" any plan prior to opening day untenable. Once we are in school and procedures are vetted, we can thwart Robert Burns's pessimism and verify our planning has effectively translated into action that safeguards our students' well-being and their academic progress. When we feel the "soft opening" has accomplished its purpose, we will focus on getting our students into Mode A/Full In-Person as quickly as responsible action can be taken. **While the Mode A/Full In-Person transition relies on the continued effectiveness of our district protocols, patterns of the pandemic in our community, and guidance of**

***state agencies, we will remain optimistic and hope to begin a rolling process for the return of all of our students to their classrooms on a daily basis quickly -- possibly within weeks.***

Since our immersion into this pandemic in March, I suspect we have all considered – and occasionally been weighed down by – the same thoughts, opinions, and feelings that, at times, change with every drawn breath. When I excitedly stepped into this role of Superintendent of Rumson schools, I did so to ensure that children get the best education in the most supportive environment possible. While it is reasonable to think the pandemic derails this focus, I can assure you it has only strengthened it. Regrettably, our school year may start very differently than any other. However, with the mindset of working together to get things right, we can transition into a schedule that is more familiar to all of us and continue to ignite the potential of our students and school community for the 2020-2021 school year....and beyond!

With pride,

Dr. John E. Bormann  
Superintendent of the Borough of Rumson School District