



WEST MORRIS REGIONAL HIGH SCHOOL DISTRICT

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To the West Morris Regional Community:

In the wake of recently released guidance from the NJ Department of Education, and grounded in numerous health and safety strategy papers from the CDC, Harvard School of Public Health, etc, we are currently working hard to formulate a strategy to safely return our students to school this August.

In developing a plan for the upcoming school year, we are designing a system which we believe (1) prioritizes the health and safety of all of our members; (2) ensures a high level of instructional continuity; and (3) is durable enough to exist remotely, in full, or in several hybrid scenarios. We are also working on returning our athletes to the field next week.

At this time, what I can tell you is that returning to school in full will be difficult. It is not possible to closely adhere to the current social distancing guidelines, even with masks and/or shields, when you are thinking about 1200 students and 150 staff members in a confined indoor space. And yet, there is nothing more I'd like to see than all of our students and staff back on campus.

The plan we are developing will be one that prioritizes full in-person instruction for our self-contained populations, and provides a hybrid in-person/remote environment for everyone else. The hybrid format will in all likelihood place students into learning cohorts (9-12), reduce the in-school enrollment (by $\frac{2}{3}$ or $\frac{1}{2}$), and rotate cohorts between in-school and virtual environments on a four consecutive day cohort cycle.

There are several advantages to a cohort model. First, by limiting the size of our cohorts, our transportation system, classroom configurations, and scheduled movement can as closely as possible adhere to both social distancing guidelines and a traditional rotation in the school day. Second, cohorts enable us to better identify and address areas of concern. Third, cohort rotation, done according to certain timelines, provides a built-in separation period that will better enable us to operate throughout the year.

Obviously, there is no system we can develop that is impenetrable. But there are systems which are safer, more responsible, and more respectful of the health and well-being of everyone in our community.

If there is anything that the last few months have revealed about the West Morris schools, it's that we are at our best when our members feel safe, when we apply the breadth of our technology and learning, when we work together, and when we take care of each other.

It's also important to note that the system we begin with might not be the one we stay with. We are all eager and ready to ramp up if/when health and safety guidelines clearly allow for relaxed standards and increased enrollment. But our system will also survive if we must return to an entirely remote universe.

Our intention is to provide you with specific scheduling/cohort information about a month prior to the start of the school year. In advance, thank you for your patience, understanding, and support.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Michael Ben-David'.

Michael Ben-David
Superintendent, West Morris Regional High School District