



Hastings-on-Hudson Public Schools

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A National Blue Ribbon District of Excellence

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August 19, 2020

Dear Hastings Community,

My first role in public education was as a teacher. I continue to make this my reference point as a Superintendent no matter what decisions I have to make. The health, safety, and welfare of children and District staff is my priority and the safe return of all children full-time in person learning is our ultimate goal. However, given current space constraints in our buildings and the need to maintain six feet of social distancing that is not currently an option.

So, after a great deal of consideration and feedback, we have decided that schools will reopen in a phased-in model that will begin with two weeks of 100% remote learning from September 8th-18th, then transitioning to the lower density hybrid model on September 21st. This approach was shared with union leaders representing teachers, teacher aides, monitors, teacher assistants, custodians, cleaners, members of building and grounds, and administrators to enlist their feedback and support. During this phased-in re-opening, we will have more time to work with teachers and administrators on how best to organize classrooms in the safest manner possible and create optimal online learning environments. The phased-in reopening schedule is below. Information about the schedule will be shared during Friday's forums.

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
7 Labor Day No School	8 100% Distance Learning for All Students	9 100% Distance Learning for All Students	10 100% Distance Learning for All Students	11 100% Distance Learning for All Students
14 100% Distance Learning for All Students Hillside--Orientation	15 100% Distance Learning for All Students Hillside--Orientation	16 Flex Wednesday 100% Distance Learning for All Students Hillside--Orientation	17 100% Distance Learning for All Students Hillside--Orientation	18 100% Distance Learning for All Students Hillside--Orientation
21 Hybrid Gold--In School Green-- Distance Learning Hillside--Modified schedule due to transportation	22 Hybrid Gold--In School Green-- Distance Learning Hillside--Modified schedule due to transportation	23 Hybrid Flex Wednesday 100% Distance Learning for All Students Hillside--Modified schedule due to transportation	24 Hybrid Green--In School Gold--Distance Learning Hillside--Modified schedule due to transportation	25 Hybrid Green--In School Gold--Distance Learning Hillside--Modified schedule due to transportation
28	29	30	1	2

Yom Kippur No School	Hybrid Gold--In School Green-- Distance Learning	Hybrid Gold--In School Green-- Distance Learning	Hybrid Green--In School Gold--Distance Learning	Hybrid Green--In School Gold--Distance Learning
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I know that this will mean some families will experience work and childcare hardships. Starting with 100% online before transitioning to a hybrid model recognizes that new safety protocols and procedures require more time for children and adults to reacclimate to schools while feeling safe. A phased-in approach was selected for these reasons:

- Preliminary technology testing results indicate that the audio quality for live streaming at home, essential to the success of the hybrid model, is not yet satisfactory. We need to test the equipment in every classroom with every teacher present, to ensure the audio quality is clear and there are no other technical issues impacting remote learning. We also need to conduct testing in real-time while teachers are live-streaming instruction to students at home.
- Teachers need time to work together to plan how they will incorporate collaborative G-Suite applications and other digital tools into their lessons. Authentic collaboration and problem-solving will be achieved through student-centered practices involving activities, projects, and assignments that students work on together, whether they are learning in person or from home. Collaborative learning models create a sense of belonging and community among children. While administrators and teachers have been exploring, training, and learning about these best practices, teachers now need time together to plan, develop, and refine lessons using these instructional practices in the context of their physical classrooms and with their colleagues.
- Hillside Elementary, with the youngest learners, will need more time to meet their teachers and classmates, learn classroom routines, tour the school, and practice using the technology tools. Their schedule needs to include time to get accustomed to the new safety routines, arrival on the bus, and dismissal. As you'll see in the calendar, we have allotted time during the week of September 14th for Hillsiders to come into the school and classroom for this orientation. In addition, you'll note the following week there is a modified Hillside schedule as we work through transportation logistics. More details will follow during our Hillside Reopening Forum on Friday (see below). Phasing in gives us time to review all of our practices, including classroom density, and make adjustments where needed. Each week, we will provide an update to the community by school to share how reopening is progressing. Superintendent's Weekly Chats, which include other administrators, will resume so that families can get answers to their questions. Building leaders will also maintain regular contact with families.
- Ultimately, we want all of our students, teachers, staff, and parents to feel comfortable with the transition to school and we hope that these two weeks will afford us the time to do just that.

We appreciate that you may still have concerns about the [Hastings Remote Learning Plan](#) and the phased reopening schedule. We are also aware of the open letter to the community from union presidents in the region raising concerns about school safety. The physical and mental health of our students, teachers, and staff is our chief concern. To that end, we,

- Will continue to follow all safety procedures from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the New York State Department of Health, the New York State Office of Facilities Planning, and the New York State Education Department.
- Will consult regularly with our Medical Director on issues of safety.
- Will ensure that masks are worn at all times by everyone present in our buildings with the exception of lunch and carefully coordinated mask breaks.
- Will supply all educators and staff with PPE including face shields.
- Have made necessary corrections to our ventilation system based on recommendations from outside engineers ([HVAC Engineer Investigation Reports](#)).
- And finally, as we learn of other needs that have not been currently identified, we will address these immediately.

We realize this decision will leave you with questions. There are four more community forums available this week which are as follows:

- Special Education School Reopening Forum, Thursday, August 20, 4:30pm-5:30pm
- Hillside Elementary School Reopening Forum, Friday, August 21, 10:00am-11:30am
- Hastings High School Reopening Forum, Friday, August 21, 12:00pm-1:30pm
- Farragut Middle School Reopening Forum, Friday, August 21, 2:00pm-3:30pm

The Zoom webinar links for these forums were shared with you yesterday and posted on our [website](#). During each forum, administrators will answer questions that pertain to their school or department. If you have any questions after the forums, please do not hesitate to contact your child's principal or assistant principal.

In addition, we continue to update our [FAQ document](#) on our website with questions of interest to the community. Melissa Szymanski, Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction, can help you with any questions about the [Hastings Remote Learning Plan](#) developed in collaboration with teachers and administrators.

Understanding there may still be concerns regarding your child's safety, protocols for school closures in the event of positive covid cases as well as options for opting out of the hybrid model can be found in our [School Reopening Plan](#) as well as our [FAQ document](#).

Our school reopening plan is just that - a plan. Based on current guidance from the State and our own health and safety requirements and protocols, it is our expectation to continue to use the hybrid model after September. However, recognizing that the facts on the ground and in our community may change, we will reevaluate and update our plan as needed. Importantly, please know that we are preparing for these contingencies should we need to adjust at any point.

Class assignments, back to school lists, and instructions on how to arrive virtually for the first days of school on September 8th will be forthcoming.

We appreciate the feedback, suggestions, and recommendations we've received from many stakeholders in the community and look forward to continuing to work together. It has only made our preparations and plans stronger. Thank you for your patience and understanding.

Sincerely,

Valerie Henning-Piedmonte