



LITTLE SILVER PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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Dear Parents of 8th Grade Students,

Over the past several months, I have written many letters, made many statements at Board meetings, and responded to numerous emails regarding the complexities of making decisions during this pandemic. During this time, some decisions have been met with scrutiny, and many were met with disappointment, including my own. However, I must stress that every decision was made based on health and safety guidelines from the CDC and in conjunction with local officials.

My May 28th Parent Letter delineated all of the reasons why a “live” graduation ceremony would be difficult. Since that correspondence, we orchestrated a picture-taking day to enable us to create a virtual graduation ceremony and class picture. We delivered lawn signs and gifts to every graduate. Eighth grade teachers recognized the academic achievements of the top ranking students in each of their content areas. The time devoted to these events was immense, but was gladly invested for the recognition of our students. We can *fully appreciate* the disappointment that parents and students are experiencing since this pandemic has changed the way we operate. That said, we can’t change the health crisis and all of the parameters surrounding this global emergency for school districts.

I’ve said several times that the school district was vetting the possibility of a gathering for our 8th grade students that would allow for proper social distancing. I reiterated this during my public comments during the June 15th Board of Education meeting. Our goal was to provide an opportunity for our 8th grade students to have one last opportunity to convene before dispersing to various high schools. We have had several conversations with our municipal partners (Mayor and Town Council representatives, Police Chief, and the Office of Emergency Management). We have collectively discussed options for an 8th grade social gathering that would comply with extensive CDC guidelines. There are some CDC guidelines that we felt could be adhered to such as:

- Having pre-packaged food (boxes or bags for each attendee) instead of a buffet or BBQ style event
- Having students bring their own beach towel or lawn chair
- Requiring that students wear face masks
- Providing hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol

There were other CDC guidelines that we discussed at length including:

- Monitoring social distancing with 8th graders who want to be with their friends
- Taking temperatures to ensure that no one with a temperature of 100.4 or above is present
- Determining the feasibility of signing yearbooks
- Cleaning and disinfecting frequently touched surfaces and objects

In terms of regulations, and CDC guidelines, schools are held to a high standard. While other public entities have loosened restrictions, there has been little guidance from the NJDOE to guide the decisions of school officials. Therefore, I have continued to make decisions based on collaborative conversations with Monmouth County School Leaders, Municipal Leaders, Police, OEM officials and the Department of Health. After discussing various scenarios, we have reached the conclusion that facilitating a social gathering for our graduates is not possible at this time.

While we all recognize the disappointment, we have reached a point where all efforts need to be focused on a school reopening plan.

Sincerely,

Carolyn M. Kossack
Superintendent of Schools