



LITTLE SILVER PUBLIC SCHOOLS

124 Willow Drive, Little Silver, NJ 07739

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Dear Parents,

As you know, Governor Murphy recently closed all of New Jersey's schools for the remainder of the 19-20 school year. We are hoping that his decision will provide us the best opportunity to reopen in September with minimal restrictions. We are deeply saddened we will not be able to reopen our doors this spring for our students or provide the same end-of-year experiences to which we all have grown accustomed. However, this presents an opportunity for us to grow in new ways as a school community and close out the school year to the best of our ability.

Along with the Governor's announcement to close for the remainder of the school year came a directive from the Commissioner of Education to revise our remote learning plans to reflect the new executive order. As he indicated, "schools are forced to make adjustments."

This pandemic has turned our lives upside down. Most parents are now balancing working from home with creating home school environments. Similarly, teachers have been asked to provide a remote learning plan for your children while balancing a school environment for their own children. The stress associated with this pandemic is impacting everyone. As humans, we tend to thrive when routines are established. When dealing with disrupted routines, we can usually rely on others to get a sense of calm. Unfortunately, everyone is experiencing the same sense of uncertainty. As a result we are trying to create an "anchor" to help manage the stress for all involved.

When we initially released our REMOTE LEARNING CENTER for Little Silver Parents, we provided specific guidelines for parents including hours that teachers would be available for questions and support. In typical Little Silver fashion, teachers have been working tirelessly. Asynchronous learning has required teachers to learn how to create Flipgrids and Screencastify videos. Synchronous learning has required teachers to learn how to facilitate video conferences with, in some cases, full classes of young children. This is no easy feat.

Since we implemented our remote learning plan, we have had to reflect and evolve. Now that the Governor has closed schools for the remainder of the year we must reflect and evolve once again. Teachers have already developed routines that are working for the majority of the population. Beginning the week of May 11th, we will be redefining teachers' schedules. The framework for teachers' schedules will be forthcoming. Specifically, within the newly defined 8 AM-12 PM schedules, teachers will continue to facilitate asynchronous activities as well as provide access to live instruction for students at least twice a week *if* those classes meet daily. Live opportunities such as whole group morning meetings, small group instruction, or one-to-one support will be communicated in advance. Parents are asked to enforce student attendance when live meetings are scheduled. I've discussed the administration of a parent survey. Respectfully, we would like to implement our redefined schedules before we elicit additional feedback.

There have been comments on both sides of the aisle regarding making Special Area classes mandatory. *We are not* going to make them mandatory. Student participation for Point Road related arts classes has continued to increase. While the participation rate is lower at Markham, parents can help us by establishing expectations for your own children to attend the Markham offerings.

I want to respectfully remind parents that when the Little Silver School District closed school beginning March 12th, teachers had no forewarning. Because there were confirmed cases of COVID-19 in our community, we closed prior to Governor Murphy's executive order to close NJ Schools. Other districts had a short period of time to plan and collect materials and resources to take home. Our teachers were not afforded that same opportunity. Therefore, they have been working to collect digital resources and provide a structured learning environment for their students. I can assure you that they have collectively availed themselves to students for many hours throughout the day. That said, due to the stress of this pandemic some parents may not have been fully aware of the opportunities afforded their children. We hope that parents will ask your child about scheduled meetings and reach out to teachers directly with questions and concerns. I believe there has been misperception regarding teacher availability and potential contact time.



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As I've acknowledged publicly many times, parents are seeking answers to questions for which I do not yet have the information. First and foremost, graduation. Questions being raised in this district are no different from the questions posed to my colleagues across the county and State. Specifically, parents are asking if a "socially distanced" graduation ceremony can be considered. Other recommendations include postponing the ceremony to the summer or fall. Monmouth County Superintendents have asked the Governor to provide guidance on this issue. Respectfully, a lack of direction from the Governor will result in districts being pitted against one another. While a few other districts may be advertising plans, it is premature to do so without confirmation of the parameters. With Graduation just six weeks away, we plan to begin planning for a virtual ceremony. Should State guidance provide other alternatives, we will certainly consider all options. In the interim, we need to begin planning so our students receive the recognition they deserve. Information that is eighth-grade specific will be sent to those parents. While all milestone events are important, eighth grade graduation involves more extensive planning than fourth grade moving up. Mr. Platt, Dr. Albert Devine and I will be working with staff to define what each celebration could look like and grade level information will be sent to parents in those grade levels.

We are committed to the continuity of instruction during this unprecedented pandemic, with the understanding that we cannot replicate school. As communicated in the past, we are trying to address grade level standards with complete acknowledgment that we need to complete a gap analysis to determine the standards that need more attention moving forward. Our teachers have been, and will continue to, address grade level standards to the best of their ability. Therefore, we WILL be issuing report cards in June. For Markham Place students, they will receive numeric grades for the third trimester for ELA, Math, Science and Social Studies. Final GPAs will be calculated based on the following weights: 40% first trimester, 40% second trimester, 20% third trimester. The health and well-being of our students was considered when making this determination. We wanted to provide latitude because of the challenges facing families, while also maintaining a level of accountability for students. Due to the circumstances of the pandemic, we will not allow a Markham Place student to score below a 65, or D-, for the third trimester. At Point Road, Preschool students will not receive a report card. Students in grades K-2 will be assessed based on progress toward grade level benchmarks for those areas that teachers feel they can accurately assess in ELA and Math. Students in grade 3 and 4 will not receive letter grades, but they will be assessed based on progress toward grade level benchmarks for those areas that teachers feel they can accurately assess for ELA and Math.

There are numerous decisions that need to be made between now and June 19th. I ask for your patience as we maneuver through each. Thank you in advance for your cooperation.

Sincerely,

Carolyn M. Kossack
Superintendent of Schools