



LITTLE SILVER PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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Dear Little Silver Families,

During each monthly Board of Education meeting, I provide the community with updates and news about our district. At the most recent meeting, I made a point of opening my report with news about the accomplishments of our current 8th grade class. I went on to highlight other items that included having parent spectators at basketball games, plans for the 8th and 4th grade field trips, using our increase in State aid to add an instructional position at MPS and our recently extended school schedule. My intention was not just to inform the public, but to also try and maintain a positive perspective that I believe is important and needed, especially during a year like this. At the same time, I knew that the circumstances at PRS and the subsequent notice that was sent home just prior to the Board meeting would result in a greater degree of frustration and concern that would likely be expressed during the meeting. Despite my efforts to address the various comments and concerns from the public, it became clear that further clarification was needed for the entire community regarding multiple topics.

On the topic of maintaining a 14-day quarantine for individuals identified as close contacts, our district follows the recommendations from the NJ Department of Health, which states that close contact quarantine periods are based on our regional risk levels for transmission (CALI report). Since our region of the State is currently in the orange or “high” risk level, the expectation is for close contacts to be excluded from school for 14 days. Once the risk level for our region moves to the yellow or “moderate” level, then we will be able to reduce the quarantine period to 10 days (or 7 with an appropriate negative PCR test result). Additional information regarding the NJDOH guidelines can be found using the following link: https://www.nj.gov/health/cd/documents/topics/NCOV/RecommendationsForLocalHealthDepts_K12Schools.pdf.

Given the timing of the decision to transition PRS to be fully virtual due to the newly confirmed cases of COVID-19, it was no surprise that many parents expressed concerns about the negative effects this decision could have on their young children. As I stated in the notice that went out last Thursday, that decision was made in consultation with the Monmouth County Health Commission. Outside of the Governor and NJDOH, the decision to close a school rests with the Superintendent. As a career educator and parent of three children, I take that decision very seriously. As I stated during the Board meeting, when the health commission staff makes a “strong recommendation” to close the school, I have the choice to follow that recommendation or ignore it. Based on the information from our new positive cases, I stand by the decision that was made. While I believe that this decision will help protect the staff and students from further transmission of the virus, I realize that there is also the potential for a negative impact on our youngest students. However, I am confident that the various activities, programs and levels of support that have been present in both of our schools all year are helping to address these types of issues and concerns.

Many of the parents that spoke out asked about the plans and intentions of the PRS staff to address the social and emotional needs of their children. Although I was not able to respond to those questions and comments in the best way possible, I feel it is critically important to remind everyone that information about all of the wonderful programs, activities and services available to PRS students can be found in the newsletters that Dr. Albert sends out each month to the entire school community in addition to letters that have been sent out about special events and activities such as Celebrating Different Learners Week, Multicultural Week and



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Spirit Days. In addition to those letters, Dr. Albert and her staff do an amazing job of creating social media posts that highlight the various special events and activities that take place at PRS. Furthermore, there are social and emotional learning (SEL) components in the curriculum for every grade level from PK-8, so teachers are implementing those types of practices in their daily classroom experiences. As was stated during the Board meeting, if parents would like to discuss issues and concerns related to their individual child, then I strongly encourage them to reach out directly to the teacher who would be more than happy to provide the type of support and resources to help address those concerns. Additionally, the teacher will also be able to coordinate additional support, if needed, with the guidance counselor, child study team and administration. As much as the Board members and I are concerned about the needs of every child, the reality is that we are not the people working directly with any student. This is why it is so important to have these discussions with the teachers, counselors, administrators and support staff at the school level.

The other topic that has been discussed during the past two Board meetings is the academic growth of our students. The slides from the presentation made by Angie Rosen during the February Board meeting included a one-year comparison. Since the February meeting, Mrs. Rosen has created two other slide decks that are also posted on the district's website. The one set of slides focuses on Kindergarten assessment data and the other is a trend analysis. All of these slides can be found under the Curriculum and Instruction tab on the district's website. In addition to this data, there are also links to Rubicon Atlas, which houses the curriculum maps for each grade level. The following link will give you access to all of this information: <https://www.littlesilverschools.org/departments/curriculum/index>.

From the start of the year, the teachers have been diligently posting information on their individual teacher pages using the Weekly Planners to provide families with updates about their schedule and expectations. Knowing that this was going to be a very different kind of year, the NJDOE provided guidance to all districts regarding the curriculum for each grade level. In short, the message to the teachers was and remains to focus on the priority standards for the grade level in each core subject area. This approach has caused some adjustments to be made in terms of pacing and content, but our staff is doing a remarkable job of working with their students to help them become proficient with the critical skills and concepts at their respective grade level so they will be prepared for what lies ahead in the next grade. As the teachers move through this final trimester and assess their students, they will be able to identify the children who need more help so that appropriate supports can be put in place.

Now that we are ready to embark on a well deserved spring break, I would like to extend my best wishes for a blessed Passover and Easter holiday. I sincerely hope that everyone enjoys the time away from school and is able to rest and get ready for the final portion of our academic year.

Respectfully,

Michael E. Ettore
Superintendent