

July 16, 2020

Re: Letter #1 - Invitation to Online Meeting to Hear Draft of Plans for Chester Academy School Building Opening

Dear Chester School Families and Community Members,

I hope you are doing well and that you are enjoying your summer. Unless you have been completely unplugged from television and social media and other forms of news you have probably heard and seen a lot of information nationally and at the state level regarding the opening of our school building in the fall. I realize that all of this has raised levels of anxiety and created questions with regard to what Chester Academy, and for that matter Pinkerton Academy, are going to look like and how this will impact your children and your families. While Pinkerton Academy will directly address reopening for high school students, our Chester School District plans must include transportation for Chester's secondary students. Please know that planning is underway and that our goal is to have a safe plan for Chester.

You are invited to join us in an online meeting to hear more about our planning process and the work that has been accomplished thus far. There will be an opportunity to provide input and ask questions. We are planning two presentations in order to accommodate as many people as possible:

1. Thursday, July 23rd at **1:30 PM**
Join us on your computer or internet connected device by clicking [this link](#).
2. Thursday, July 23rd at **7 PM**
Join us on your computer or internet connected device by clicking [this link](#).

The password for both meetings is '**ChesterNH**'. Information for joining this meeting will also be posted on our website at www.sau82.org.

I want to reassure you that **NO** final decisions have been made regarding plans for the start of the school year. This forum is meant to inform you and to share our current views of how we plan to proceed with the coming school year. School reopening is both a state and local decision. Of course parents retain the responsibility of making specific decisions for their own children. The Chester School Board is charged with final decisions on Chester Academy building reopening plans. We have targeted August 5th as our date to make final recommendations to the Board.

As we move forward, we are committed to ensuring the health and safety of all involved and to identifying the responsibilities that will be shared by all stakeholders. Staff, students and parents/guardians will each have a role in Chester Academy students having a successful educational experience. We understand that our risk reduction strategy is different from a

guarantee. There is no such thing as 'zero risk', in anything we do, and certainly not during a pandemic. As suggested by the guidance provided by the Governor and the NH Department of Education (NHDOE), we are in the process of developing three different school reopening scenarios:

1. An in person model which follows the American Pediatric Association Guidelines of a three foot minimal physical distancing with staff and students wearing masks (parents may choose an option of telepresence which will allow their child to view classroom lectures, participate in many classroom activities, and communicate with their teacher(s) from home.)
2. A hybrid model where select students attend school in the building and others attend remotely.
3. A completely remote model, where we will incorporate things learned from our initial venture into remote learning in the spring.

Over the last few weeks there have been several working groups in our district focused on different areas of the reopening on what works best for the Chester School District. These groups have a mix of school board members, school staff, and parents. In addition, the survey data that you and other families provided us a few weeks ago has been helpful in our planning process.

Our decision making process for what the start of school will look like will focus on the safety of our staff and students combined with the educational benefit of returning to an in person school environment. When we have enough information, we will work closely with our collective bargaining units to develop a plan that focuses on health, safety, and education. We are using the latest medical information provided to us by the NH Department of Health and Human Services (NHDHHS), the latest guidance from the NHDOE, and the resources that we have available to us as a district. We welcome input and feedback from the community and staff as we go through this process.

To that end, I wanted to share with you some updates on where we are. As you will see below, a significant amount of work is happening behind the scenes for the planning and preparation for the reopening of school.

Here are some current updates:

1. Personal Protective Equipment-Over the last several weeks, we have been ordering PPE and other products to protect staff and students when we are in person. While we anticipate individuals providing their own cloth masks, we know that we will need to have some on hand. Here is a list of what has been ordered.

1. Disposable masks (adult and child)
2. Clear masks (for special education)
3. Gloves
4. Gowns (For nurses and other personnel that work with high risk students)

5. Face Shields (For those working with higher risk students)
6. Goggles (For Nurses)
7. Hand Sanitizer Dispensers for high traffic areas and all classrooms
8. Approved Hand Sanitizer and Disinfectant
(We are in search of KN95 Masks for nurses.)

2. Technology and Curriculum Purchases-To help facilitate our online learning, we have purchased a significant amount of technology and curriculum tools to support teachers and students this upcoming school year. Here are some of the highlights.

1. Replacement chromebooks to continue our three-year lease cycle
2. Microphones for synchronous¹ learning
3. Cameras for synchronous learning (where needed)
4. Continued our textbook replacement cycle with an eye toward digital access. This year we replaced our World Language materials and added Eureka Math for grades 7 & 8 (the rest of the school already uses Eureka Math). Many of our pre-existing textbooks and curriculum materials already have digital components.
5. Added digital components to our Eureka Math tools, including videos, fillable pdfs, and digital assessments
6. Added a host of digital tools for use in- and out-of a physical classroom allowing for write-on pdfs, drawing programs, leveled readers, etc.
7. Improved Single Sign On (SSO) options so that students will not need to use and remember as many passwords.

3. Classroom Space Analysis- As part of developing the in person and hybrid models we are currently analyzing each learning space in Chester Academy to determine the in person capacity of every classroom using the 3-6 foot recommendation of the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP). This would include a requirement for masks for all staff and students. Our youngest children in K-2nd grade will need modeling and practice (with built in mask breaks) to develop this skill. We have acknowledged, as did the AAP that this is not a realistic expectation for our Preschool youngsters. Other safety protocols include proper handwashing, daily cleaning and disinfecting, and following proper protocols for staff and students when they are sick. The 3-6 foot distance is defined as measured from the seat of one desk to the seat of an adjacent desk. This information will allow us to plan for schedules, lunch, specialists, appropriate planning time, etc.

4. Start of School- We may propose to the Chester School Board a delay to the start of school until after Labor Day. This time would be allocated to staff for training and professional development in preparation for the beginning of the school year, regardless of the model. Once we have more information and a definitive answer, we will publish a new revised school calendar.

¹ Synchronous learning is online or distance education that happens in real time, whereas asynchronous learning occurs through online channels without real-time interaction.

5. Other areas being developed - Our work groups are discussing bus transportation, parent drop off and pick up, Food Services, athletics, physical education, extended day programs (YMCA and Homework Help Space) and extra-curricular activities (i.e. band, drama, chorus), and a variety of other topics. This information will help inform us even further as to what school will look like. We have already begun conversations with our staff on these topics and as to what it could look like.

6. Comcast Discount for Families-I have provided a link, for your information, to a program from Comcast Learning for a discount on high speed internet to our income qualified families. The information is [here](#).

Below for your perusal are four documents that are informing our work:

1. Governor's and NHDOE Grades K-12 Back-to-School Guidance - <https://www.covidguidance.nh.gov/sites/g/files/ehbemt381/files/inline-documents/sonh/k-12-back-to-school.pdf>
2. NH Department Health and Human Services - <https://www.nh.gov/covid19/resources-guidance/schools.htm>
3. American Academy of Pediatrics Guidance - <https://services.aap.org/en/pages/2019-novel-coronavirus-covid-19-infections/clinical-guidance/covid-19-planning-considerations-return-to-in-person-education-in-schools/>
4. CDC School Guidance - <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/schools.html>

I encourage you to reach out to Principal Karen Lacroix, to School Board Chair Royal Richardson, Vice Chair Jonathan Ekerman or me if you have any specific questions. We will be sending parents a follow-up survey in the near future to get further feedback. In addition, we will be having staff forums in the next few weeks for staff members to hear updated information and ask any questions that they may have. I will continue to send you updates when additional information becomes available.

Thank you for your continued patience and support. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Be safe and enjoy your summer.

Sincerely,

Darrell J. Lockwood

Darrell J. Lockwood, Ed.D.
Superintendent of Schools