



*Serving With Pride The
Township of Manalapan
and the
Borough of Englishtown*

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Dear Parent(s)/Guardian(s),

Over the last several days I have received a large number of emails. They fall into basically two categories. The first category points out that all the neighboring districts are closing and what am I waiting for. The state is turning red and it seems that I do not care about the safety of their children. The other category consists of emails that range from imploring me to keep the schools open because the children need to be in school to those that verge on ordering me not to shut the schools.

I am going to take this opportunity to explain what my plans are for the next several months and the basis for any decisions I will make during that time period. First I can not comment on why neighboring districts have decided to go remote. Every district is different and I am unaware of the conditions in those districts that lead to those decisions. My focus will be on the Manalapan-Englishtown Regional School District.

Second, I agree with Dr. Fauci that the schools are some of the safest places in the country at this point. And that is because of three things. Everyone is wearing a mask, social distancing is in place and contact tracing is being done on every positive case. It is for this reason that it is my desire to keep the schools open for as long as possible.

That being said, there are several circumstances that will have an impact on my ability to keep the schools open.

1. The Governor decides to close the schools as he did in March of last year. I will have no option but to follow that directive.
2. Through contact tracing it is determined that there are multiple cases (2-4) of in-school transmission of COVID-19 in a school. The Manalapan Health Department and the district will review and decide whether it is appropriate to close the school. It is my belief that given this circumstance we would close a school.
3. The inability to maintain the safety and security in the building due to a high number of staff either under quarantine or ill with the virus. This would lead to principals being unable to have adult supervision in every classroom. Initially, this would lead to several classrooms being placed on remote instruction and if conditions worsened, it would lead to a building being placed on remote. This is a building by building decision and it would be quite possible that several buildings in the district could be on remote instruction while several continue in-person instruction.
4. Busing: At this time we are a 100% busing district. Currently, we are able to address the high number of absences by using a process called "doubling up". What that involves is a driver will finish his or her regular route at a school and then returns to the school to complete a different route. This causes some minor delays but with the hybrid program and the smaller number of students on the bus the delays have been minimized. If I am informed that due to the high number of drivers under quarantine or ill from the virus we are unable to

transport all students, I will request an emergency board meeting where I will request that courtesy busing be discontinued for a 30 day period. If the board approves my request parents will be given a few days notice to prepare for the change. If the board does not approve my request, the district will move to remote instruction for a 30 day period.

5. Mechanics: The district has three mechanics to maintain the safety of the bus fleet. If those mechanics become unavailable due to quarantine or illness, the district would be placed in a position where it could not address the mechanical needs of the bus fleet. If placed in that situation the district would move to remote instruction for a 30 day period.

These are the situations that could close the district and the strategies being implemented by the district to remain open. You can be assured that we are doing everything we can to remain open. At this time, it is impossible to find substitute teachers and bus drivers are even harder to find. The status of other districts does not change our ability to find substitutes, most people have contracts and are remaining available for their districts' reopenings.

I anticipate that the state will enter the red zone sometime between the end of December and January. While it has been reported in the media that schools must close when that occurs, that is inaccurate. What is required is that districts consider closing and moving to virtual instruction but it is stated that the final decision is left to the Superintendent. We are in close contact with the Manalapan Health Department, they are aware of our plans and agree with our current approach.

I hope this email answers most of your questions. I am sure it will lead to many additional emails in my inbox. I used to pride myself on responding to every email. I apologize that during this pandemic I am no longer able to maintain that standard. I can assure you that I read them and if someone comes up with something that will help this situation, I will act on it.

It is going to be a difficult few months ahead. The vaccine is on the horizon and hopefully by next year this will be all behind us. The reasons why the schools are safe are because everyone wears a mask, we maintain social distancing and we contact trace. Please follow these practices outside of school, it will decrease the number of positive cases in the community and make it easier for us to keep the schools open for the rest of this school year.

Enjoy this holiday season and let's all hope for a happy new year! Stay healthy.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "John J. Marciante, Jr., Ph.D." The signature is written in a cursive style.

John J. Marciante, Jr., Ph.D.
Superintendent of Schools