



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

John J. Marciante, Jr., Ph.D.

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Dear Parent(s)/Guardian(s):

Four days down, one hundred and seventy six to go. While the temperatures have been lower than expected, the Dew Point in Toms River was 75 yesterday and a random sampling of the temperatures in the buildings found rooms between 81 and 83. Since evening temperatures are predicted to be in the fifties and low sixty's next week, we will increase ventilation in the evening and it is my intent to open all buildings on Tuesday, September 22, 2020 (which will be an "A" day).

Usually the biggest problem we have the first week of school is transportation. Delays, missed stops and stuff like that. This year transportation has been relatively good. It helps that two thirds of the students are still at home but the kindergarteners and the first graders are learning the new routine and I expect when we bring everyone back it will be a smooth transition.

Technology has been my biggest concern this year. We are using it in a manner that it was never designed to be used. The capacity of our bandwidth and chromebooks has been pushed to the limit and clearly over the first several days some structural weaknesses have become apparent. Surprisingly, not really, some of our problems are related to an issue at Google which they are addressing at this time. Over the next several weeks we will be increasing our bandwidth and currently we are shifting equipment as well as upgrading capabilities of our desktops which will allow our staff not to rely on Wi-Fi and chromebooks for instruction. Most of you will see the impact of this next week.

While I personally choose to never read what is on Facebook I am well aware of what is being said in the community. There are numerous comments comparing the amount of direct instruction and level of engagement for the hybrid students who are attending school, those not yet attending school (2nd thru 6th grade, excluding Wemrock Brook) and those children in the Virtual Academy. Some of the previously mentioned technology issues impacted the district's model for synchronous instruction (synchronous mini lesson, followed by independent work supported by direct teacher support during office hours at the end of the day) in mathematics. It is our intent that next week all technological issues in this area will be addressed and in the following weeks the amount of synchronous instruction will be expanded into the other content areas, language arts, science and social studies, to the extent that it is appropriate. When this transition is completed the level of engagement and the quality of education will be consistent throughout the district.

Finally, in my last communication I indicated that between August 26th and September 8th the district would not be addressing any additional requests to transfer from the hybrid program to Virtual Academy or vice versa and these requests would be addressed after the start of school. This allowed the administration to prepare for the opening of school. As you are aware, I have stated repeatedly, it was my belief that transfers to the virtual academy could occur relatively quickly while transfers into the hybrid program would have to wait until at least the end of the first semester

in December due to the impact of the requirements of social distancing. I was completely wrong on this issue. I did not anticipate that 25% of our students would prefer a 100% virtual environment. At this time the administration is actively working on any transfer request into the hybrid program. We have multiple openings in almost all grade levels in every building. On the other hand, class sizes in the virtual academy are already beyond what we would prefer and the program cannot handle any additional students.

That being said, once the school year begins the district is required to have a virtual option as well as a new protocol and deadlines for applying to a 100% virtual program. At this time I am establishing the following timelines: All transfer requests for a 100% virtual program must be received by 4 PM on Tuesday, September 29, 2020. If you have already requested a transfer, you do not need to submit an additional request. A request can be a simple email to the principal of your child's current placement. It is my goal that all children will be placed in a 100% virtual program by October 5th.

I recognize that for many of you the request for a 100% virtual program is due to your concern for your child's health and safety. Until your child is transferred she or he will remain in the hybrid program. While I can assure you that we have done everything required by the state to maintain a safe environment, I understand that may not be enough for you. If you choose to keep your child home on his or her day to attend school I have already waived attendance requirements due to the pandemic and district protocols for children who miss a day of school will be followed. I am sure your child's teacher will find a way to work with your child.

Today is 9/11, I am sure all of you remember what you were doing that day and many of you lost loved ones. As I stood in the parking lot of South River High School and watched the smoke coming out of the World Trade Center I had no idea what the next day was going to bring. The pandemic which has been impacting all aspects of our lives since March has even impacted how we remember this day. I can't tell you what we will have to deal with the next few months, but what I can say, is that by working together we will get through this just as we did nineteen years ago.

Stay healthy.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "John J. Marciante, Jr., Ph.D." The signature is written in black ink and is positioned to the left of the typed name.

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