



MILLBURN TOWNSHIP SCHOOLS

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**Dr. Christine Burton**

□ *Superintendent of Schools* □

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## SUPERINTENDENT'S RETURN TO SCHOOL UPDATE IMPORTANT!!!

August 20, 2020

Dear Millburn Schools Community,

In our ongoing efforts to share information and data about our Return to School planning, this is a very important announcement regarding the start of school.

### Millburn Schools will start the school year virtual for all students

- I will be recommending that the Board approve **Millburn Schools to start the school year fully virtual** for all students, as allowed by Governor Murphy's [Executive Order 175](#).
- Schools will **start on September 8th** as reflected in an [updated calendar](#) (requires board approval on Monday, August 24th). Moving the start date for students will allow our staff to use these additional days in the first week of September for professional development and preparations for virtual teaching.
- We anticipate schools will be virtual for the first quarter of the school year, which is until November 9. **We will attempt to bring students in earlier on a phase-in plan.** We will prioritize special populations, ELL, and Pre K-2 to start and then move up the grade levels. As students return to in-person instruction, there may be adjustments to their classroom assignment or schedule to accommodate.

### Contributing factors for starting school virtually:

- **Health protocols:**  
New protocols from the **NJ Department of Health released *last week* require, rather than recommend**, 6 feet of social distancing in classrooms. While we were planning to create 6-foot distances wherever possible, we must now comply with the 6-foot requirement for all student classrooms and spaces. This requirement

impacts our class sizes, cohorts, and space use in our buildings. It also requires the restructuring of our schedules, cohorts and groupings which is not feasible at this point for a September start.

Under these additional protocols, the [NJ Department of Health](#) has now provided much more **specific guidelines for contact tracing, quarantine protocols, and closure requirements** (e.g., if two people in different classrooms get sick, the entire school could shut down. If siblings are involved, it can impact the closure of multiple schools). We need **additional time** to review our plans, and potentially adjust, our cohorting and screening plans based on the new guidance.

- **Staffing:**

We are experiencing a significant reduction in the number of available staff **due to 79 submissions for work accommodations for medically-documented reasons or for childcare leave under the Family and Medical Leave Act received as of Monday August 17th**. Staff have **received certification from physicians** for medical concerns regarding high-risk conditions as determined by the CDC. Requests are still being submitted. ([Information about the state and federal laws can be found here.](#))

We investigated the possibility of having **substitutes** to provide the in-person supervision necessary in classrooms, while some teachers were going to teach their classes remotely. The **substitute service could not meet the needs of the district** to provide for the number of substitutes and even if they were able to be filled, it was at a cost of **\$140,000 per month or \$1.4 million per year**, which is not currently available in our budget.

- **Air Quality / Ventilation:**

The air quality and ventilation of classrooms around the district will need to be reviewed to ensure compliance with the updated standards that were **released by the NJ Department of Health *last week***. Many of our buildings have had upgrades to the HVAC systems as part of our ongoing referendum projects, which should help ensure we are able to meet the standards. Unfortunately, some areas of our buildings are not served by new units.

The **Middle School** building has **unique challenges with the existing aging geothermal system**, which is slated for replacement under the latest referendum, but will be a multi-year effort to complete.

We **need additional time** to ensure we are meeting all of the standards and have an opportunity to conduct testing at each building to ensure safety for all students and staff. In the event that any sections of our buildings are not able to meet these

standards, we will need to complete additional scheduling changes to avoid using those areas.

- **Scheduling to Support Parent Selection (Hybrid / Remote)**

The numbers of students to be scheduled into Hybrid and Remote Plans required greater adjustments than anticipated, due to the data trending toward greater levels of families selecting the remote model. Beginning school all-remote will enable us to provide the most equitable instruction to all of our students.

## **New Virtual Learning Model:**

Our virtual learning model has been **newly-designed to provide the full school day schedule to be implemented virtually**. The model has been a collaborative effort this summer by our Teachers, the Instruction Task Force Subcommittee, Technology Facilitators and the Curriculum and Instruction Department. Details follow below:

- **Elementary Schedule (Pre-K-5): 8:35 - 3:00**

Students will be guided by teachers throughout the school day. **The virtual day will mirror a traditional school day** with appropriate breaks and independent assignments replicating the in-school classroom experience. Homework will be assigned as applicable.

Depending on the age of the child, **parents may need to provide assistance as their students navigate the school day**.

The virtual day will follow a schedule with blocks of time designated for Reading, Writing, Mathematics, Social Studies/Science, Related Arts and Special Service Programming.

- Instruction blocks will be a blend of whole groups, small groups, and independent assignments.
- Students will be given time for breaks, lunch, snacks etc.
- **Elementary students will be provided with learning toolkits/resources to use at home**. These items are similar to what is used in the classroom, but now made available for use at home.

- **Middle & High School Schedule: 8:00 - 2:25**

**Students will be guided and instructed by teachers throughout the school day. The virtual day will mirror a traditional school day** with appropriate breaks and independent assignments replicating the in-school classroom experience.

- This schedule will have the normal 41-minute periods of instruction and breaks to give students time to get lunch and stretch breaks away from the computer.
- Homework will be assigned as applicable.
- This will also include traditional grading and assessments.

- **Childcare**

SAM and AlphaBest are putting together options for families who need childcare assistance during the school day. **This assistance will only be provided in our school buildings while the buildings are not open for in-person instruction.** When buildings open for in-person instruction, these services will need to be adjusted to fit in available spaces. More information will be forwarded soon regarding the application process, number of students that can be accommodated, and details on the programming.

- **Athletics**

To the extent that NJSIAA continues to allow athletics, we will adhere to their standards and provisions for the safety of our student-athletes. Students will be allowed to participate in athletics, subject to NJSIAA requirements, regardless of whether they are enrolled in Hybrid or Virtual instruction.

- **Education Foundation Support**

We have reached out to The Millburn Education Foundation to partner with us to provide resources and supplies for Virtual Learning and special projects for parents, teachers, and students. We thank them for their support.

- **Parent Support for Remote Learning**

We will be providing parents with training and resources to navigate the technology platforms that students will be using during virtual learning.

*Next Week:* Mark your calendar for these trainings by Google for parents:

August 25 at 6pm - [Getting Started with Google Meet and Classroom](#)

August 26 at 6pm - [Getting Started with Google Meet and Classroom](#)

Date/Time TBD - [Getting Started with Google Meet and Classroom](#)

*Coming Soon:* Parent Education webpage that will share resources for technology and learning from home.

## Upcoming Information Sessions:

- **Town Hall Meeting - Monday, August 24, 5:00 to 6:00 pm** (in advance of the BOE meeting): Dr. Burton and administrators will address questions about the remote learning plan as detailed in this letter.
- **Board of Education Meeting - Monday, August 24, 6:00 pm**
  - Attend these meetings as a viewer:

<https://pubsec.webex.com/pubsec/onstage/g.php?MTID=e803abfaa0d9cc0137fb8d5f21c810e4e>

- Call into this meeting: +1-415-655-0002 Access code: 135 000 7511
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Be well and stay safe,

***Christine Burton***

Dr. Christine Burton  
*Superintendent of Schools*