



SOUTHERN REGIONAL HIGH SCHOOL DISTRICT OF OCEAN COUNTY

Governor Murphy

The Southern Regional School District has always been, and will continue to be, focused on the health and safety of our students, staff, and community. During the pandemic we took bold steps to protect both our workforce and our community by hosting an Ocean County Health Department Supersite Vaccine Clinic twice a week from January through June. This effort allowed all of our workforce who chose to be vaccinated to be served along with members of the general population. During the peak enrollment periods 500 to 700 individuals were provided for at each of the clinics we hosted. Moreover, when the vaccine was approved for the 12 to 17 age population, Southern Regional partnered with Walmart to provide the vaccination to students on campus during the school day. We have invested significantly in PPE, infrastructure improvements and training to return to full-day instruction. We returned to full-day, five-day, in-person instruction in February through which we had 73% of our high school students and 84% of our middle school students participating. We remained in that mode through the end of the school year and are very proud of that accomplishment.

You have entrusted the districts with the responsibility of generating a reopening plan by providing a framework that allows districts to operate within the individuality of its community. Throughout our decision making we have consulted with our local union leadership and our full staff-at-large. We have held numerous informational meetings for parents through which feedback was used in the shaping of plans. What started as a way to help the community and staff understand how decisions are made during the pandemic has evolved into the standard of how Southern Regional serves the children, staff, and families of our district. It is also the model that we had planned to follow when making decisions about screening and PPE requirements. As the number of vaccinated individuals increases in our community we continue to monitor the data in our seven constituent municipalities. Our daily case count continues to be significantly lower than in the beginning of the 2020/2021 school year.

While we realize this situation is fluid, we are committed to continue steps to get us closer to normal and provide our students a whole educational experience in a safe environment. As of now, executive order 251, as well as the recommendation by the CDC, requires those in schools to continue wearing masks. As always, Southern Regional will operate in compliance with all state mandates.

However, we believe we are at a point when the state policy regarding students and staff wearing masks at school could be responsibly re-evaluated. We respectfully request consideration for masks to be left to the local school district administration as long as data continues to trend in the right direction. We base our position on the latest local and federal data as well as the proactive steps we have already taken to increase vaccination rates in our school community. We strongly believe that we could safely take the next big step in getting back to normal. Within our respective reopening plans we urge you to allow districts to decide if masks are a necessity based on local data. We welcome state leadership's support in choosing responsible data driven metrics that will enable our local school districts to make the best decision for their local community.

Sincerely,

Kevin C. Lyons, Board of Education President

