

Canastota Central School District

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April 21, 2021

Dear Canastota Families,

I would like to take this opportunity to provide you with an update on the status of our district reopening plan. **At last night's Board of Education meeting, the School Board approved a resolution that paves the way for a return to daily, in-person instruction for all students in grades K-12 who had indicated that option as their preferred instruction model for the remainder of the year. The return of students to daily in-person instruction in grades 7-12 is scheduled for next Wednesday, April 28th.** Families who would like to remain in a remote instructional model, or who would like to transition to a remote model, still have that option. Additionally, please be assured that our K-6 students who are already engaged in daily in-person instruction will continue to do so without interruption. After a difficult year navigating through multiple changes in regulations and guidance documents, we are extremely pleased to be able to now offer daily in-person instruction for all our students.

It is important to note that our decision was based upon a full evaluation of all of the factors that impact our return to school. As you will recall, we had already announced a full return to in-person instruction that was scheduled to start this past Monday, but a new state guidance document issued on April 9th necessitated a change in our timeline. As I've noted in previous communications, initiating a pause in our return to school plan was absolutely the right thing to do for the following reasons:

1) Clarification on the specific data points (regional positivity rates, new infection rates/100,000 population) impacting schools was still unfolding as we arrived at the end of last week. In my estimation, it would have been irresponsible to return to school when we still did not have complete information regarding the requirements to do so. The new guidance specifically states that the school Board must pass a resolution before a change in schedule is implemented. How could I ask the Board to do so when the criteria for returning was still being confirmed? From the beginning, we promised to do things the right way, not the fastest way. Making decisions with complete information is consistent with our process utilized since the beginning of the pandemic.

2) The pause allowed us to gather specific feedback from our school community, which was a required element in the guidance document. In the survey issued last Friday, 78% of parents responded that they were comfortable with a daily return to in-person instruction with universal masking and a minimum of three feet of physical distancing in place. This was a key piece of information, as the guidance document from the NYSDOH states that "Ultimately, the school/district's decision to move to shorter physical distances will come down to a local community's risk tolerance based on its unique

circumstances”. In this case, the community spoke loudly and clearly – the vast majority of our families want their children back in school every day.

3) With further clarification from our local health department, we now feel comfortable that we can absolutely meet the requirements established by the NYSDOH. With confidence in our ability to meet the guidance standards, and with overwhelming support of the local school community, we are fully confident that the return to daily in-person instruction is the right decision for Canastota.

As students in grades 7-12 return to daily in-person instruction next Wednesday, April 28th, I'd like to remind families that we still need to hear from you if you would like some of the additional available accommodations mentioned in the survey. For example, desk barriers, which are currently in use in 7th and 8th grade classrooms, are no longer a component of the CDC or NYSDOH guidance. Given this change in guidance, the desk barriers will no longer be used as of Wednesday, April 28th. If you would like your child to still have access to a desk barrier, please contact the main office at your child's school and we will provide them with a barrier. Additionally, if you would like your child to have a face shield (also not required), please contact the office and we will provide this as well. Finally, given the new standards for distancing, if you are changing to a remote model of instruction please contact the main office and notify the principal of your decision.

As we move to this new phase of our instructional plan for the remainder of the 2020-21 school year, I once again would like to thank you for your support of our school. Please be assured that through all of the twists and turns throughout the year, the safety and well-being of our students and staff members has always been our priority. That will not change. We will continue to be meticulous in our adherence to the guidance, and we'll continue to work to find the balance necessary to provide a safe learning environment while at the same time providing our students with academic and social/emotional support that they need. So many of our students need more frequent connection with their teachers and peers, and we're excited to have them back with us on a daily basis. As always, please contact me, or any of our main offices if you have any questions.

Sincerely,
Shawn Bissetta
Superintendent of Schools