

# ARLINGTON CENTRAL SCHOOL DISTRICT

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Dear Arlington Families,

This past week, we have received new guidance from the Dutchess Department of Behavioral & Community Health, NYS DOH, and from the CDC that gives local school districts more flexibility to utilize barriers and desk shields to reduce physical distancing in our classrooms and other school spaces. This would allow us to bring more students back into our schools. While this is good news, this is still a complex situation. We are working through what this means for Arlington. I want to provide a fuller understanding of the issues at hand.

## Grades K-2

As you are aware, we will be bringing our hybrid students in grades K-2 back into classrooms four days (and eventually five days a week). In order to accomplish this goal, we are adding seven additional class sections/overflow rooms.

What makes this challenge more complex for Arlington is that we are one of the few districts that has a separate remote-only Elementary Online Program that involves over 900 students and 47 teachers and related service providers. This impacts our hybrid class sizes, resulting in many combined cohorts of more than 22 students. Even by reducing physical distancing from 6'x6' to 3'x6', the size of several of our classrooms is too small for the number of students in these classrooms, which is the reason we need seven overflow rooms.

I am pleased to report that we have received the necessary barriers and air filters for grades K-2 and will soon be setting up the classrooms. We are in the process of hiring teachers to fill those overflow classrooms. We look forward to welcoming our K-2 students back starting at four days a week no later than March 22.

## Grades 3-5

In accordance with the new guidelines, we have determined that with some re-imagined use of school space we now have the capacity to bring back hybrid students in grades 3-5 four days a week. At this time, we can **only** accommodate *current* hybrid students due to space limitations. However, our survey will ask hybrid students if they want to move to remote or if they wish to continue as hybrid students under the new physical distancing protocols. We ask that remote only Arlington Online School families contact their principals regarding any special needs or concerns regarding their children. Our 3-5 survey will also ask hybrid parents about their transportation needs. Depending on the number of students requiring transportation, students may be assigned two to a seat.

The challenge of having a separate Elementary Online School, as mentioned above, is that students who are remote only are in their own class sections rather than livestreaming into classrooms. We do not want to disrupt this educational model mid-year for our remote only students who have well established routines and relationships with their teachers and classmates.

For our hybrid students in grades 3-5, we are moving forward with our livestreaming plan, while at the same time beginning to work toward bringing our hybrid students back to school four (and eventually five) days to join our K-2 students on March 22.

Some of you have pointed to our neighboring district in Wappinger Falls who are bringing their hybrid elementary students back to school more quickly. Please note that similar to Arlington, in order for Wappingers to make this happen, they also relied on the number of remote only students to remain the same. Because they did not institute a

separate online program, they are not grappling with same staffing and space considerations that we are dealing with in our district.

### **Grades 6-12**

In grades 6-12, similar to Wappingers Falls, if the percentage of remote only students remains basically the same, we project that by the beginning of the 4<sup>th</sup> quarter in April, we will be able to return all hybrid students 4 days per week to start and to eventually increase to 5 days per week.

### **Next Steps**

Since we are planning to bring all of our K-12 students back to school full-time for the 2021/22 school year (with a remote only option if NYS regulations allow), we have ordered and are receiving desk shields and air purifiers that we would need for the 21-22 school year. While we are anxious for our students to return to school full-time, we are committed to following the recommended safety protocols. In order to reduce physical distancing to 3' X 6', we are making sure that barriers and air purifiers are properly installed, new cleaning protocols are strictly followed, and all mitigation protocols are strictly followed— "like muscle memory." We do not want to sacrifice health and safety for the sake of a speedy start date. This situation requires careful planning and attention to detail.

### **Tasks that Remain**

The tasks that remain are as follows:

- Next week, we are sending our grade 3-5 and secondary families surveys, so that by Friday, we can determine our transportation, food services, and faculty/staffing needs. The secondary school information will help us configure our space needs in order to meet our goal.
- Recruit and hire 7-9 new contracted certified elementary substitute teachers
- Receive full order of desk shields and air purifiers
- Receive additional desks that have already been ordered
- Install all equipment.
- Complete physical Infrastructure work in buildings where needed

### **Target Dates**

Target dates will depend on the survey results, arrival dates of equipment, and whether we need to recruit more staff.

- March 22: Grades K-2 full-time 4 days a week
- March 22: Grades 3-5 full time 4 days per week
- April 19: Grades K-5 full time 5 days per week
- 4<sup>th</sup> quarter (possibly sooner): Grades 6-12 four days per week (like Wappingers) then moving to 5 days per week

As we move forward, next week I will be asking for parent volunteers to work with me on an ad-hoc parent advisory committee to improve communications and transparency as we deliver the goals of bringing all our hybrid students in school as well as planning for the 21-22 school year. I will be asking teachers and principals to join me in this endeavor.

I look forward to keeping you fully up to date on our progress and any challenges as we move forward to bringing our hybrid students back to school at least four days a week. The more we can work together and understand that each school district has a different set of challenges to face in bringing kids back in full-time, the better we will be able to create a safe, high-quality plan that will provide our children with a more normal educational experience for the remainder of the year. Moreover, this process will fully prepare us for the fall.

Sincerely,

Larry Licopoli, Ph.D.