



Union County Educational Services Commission

45 Cardinal Drive
Westfield, New Jersey 07090
Phone: 908-233-9317
Fax: 908-233-7432
Transportation Fax: 908-518-1669

Terry Foppert
Superintendent
tfoppert@ucesc.org

Michael J. Kowalski
Assistant Superintendent
mkowalski@ucesc.org

Eric Larson
Business Administrator/
Board Secretary
el Larson@ucesc.org

Lorraine Vitiello
Transportation Coordinator
lvitiello@ucesc.org

August 26, 2020

Dear UCESC Parents and Guardians:

I hope this letter finds you well and enjoying the final weeks of summer.

Over the past two months, our administrators have worked tirelessly to prepare for the 2020-2021 school year. All efforts have focused on two guiding principles – the health, safety and welfare of students and staff and the unwavering belief that students must return to the structure and engagement of traditional classrooms.

I am extremely proud of the Restart and Recovery Plan that was presented to our Board of Directors earlier this month. The health and safety protocols; cleaning and sanitization regimens; and hybrid instructional schedules represent a best-practice approach to reopening schools during these unprecedented times. This was affirmed when our plan was approved without exception by the New Jersey Department of Education on August 7, 2020.

On August 13, Governor Phil Murphy announced that New Jersey’s public school districts can begin the year with full-time remote learning programs if they cannot adequately meet critical health and safety requirements. Since that order was released, a significant number of districts have informed communities of their decisions to implement full-time remote learning in September. This trend is contributing to many unanticipated consequences.

Over the past two weeks, the Commission has received a sizable number of requests from our teachers and staff for accommodations or leaves of absence due to underlying health conditions, family related medical conditions, and in many cases, childcare concerns resulting from the growing list of school closures.

While we have worked up to the very last minute to welcome students to traditional in-person instruction, I am concerned about the educational and safety challenges associated with a reduced number of staff in our buildings. Therefore, I made the extremely difficult decision last night to seek the approval of the UCESC Board of Directors and the Union County Executive Superintendent to temporarily shift all district schools to remote learning in September. You can review our revised Restart and Recovery Plan on our website at www.ucesc.org.

Our extremely talented teachers, therapists and paraprofessionals represent the greatest assets of the Commission. By beginning the year via remote learning, we can work closely with our Board Physician and Board Attorney to process leave and accommodation requests with the attention each deserves. Our administrators will review master schedules to ensure that students can return safely with appropriate social distancing and supervision across all grades and courses. Finally, we will focus energy over the upcoming weeks to provide intensive teacher training on remote learning and carefully review our district safety protocols to ensure that we are well-prepared for the remainder of the year.

The school year will officially begin for students on Tuesday, September 8, 2020. You can expect to receive correspondence from your child’s principal regarding teacher assignments, course schedules, technology distribution, and other information relevant to the school year. Our goal is to offer robust and meaningful educational programs that are tailored to individual needs and maximize opportunities for “live” instruction, related services and support.

While Commission schools operate on full-time remote learning schedules, I remind you of your ability to obtain breakfast and/or lunch for your child at one of your local public schools. I encourage you to review information posted on your district's website and contact your child's Principal or Social Worker should you require any assistance. We are always here to help and will collaborate with your district until any issues are resolved.

The COVID-19 pandemic has created substantial hardships and anxieties for our students, families and staff members. I recognize that our decision to begin the year via remote learning may present childcare, work and other scheduling challenges. I assure you that our team is committed to reopening schools for traditional instruction without undue delay.

Barring any unforeseen circumstances or shifts in community health, it is my intention to submit my recommendation for schools to resume in-person instruction by mid-October at the meeting of our Board of Directors on October 7, 2020. I will share updates with you on a regular basis leading to this decision.

Please do not hesitate to contact your child's principal or my office if you have any questions.

Thank you for your continued support.

Sincerely,

Michael J. Kowalski

Michael J. Kowalski
Acting Superintendent