

Greetings Parents and Guardians,

I trust that this message finds you well and enjoying the last remaining weeks of the summer. The purpose of this email is to give parents/guardians an update on covid protocols and information as we ready ourselves for the upcoming school year. Our collective goal for this year is to give our students, teachers, staff and parents the most safe and normal year that we possibly can under the current covid circumstances. It will look and feel much better than last year, but I anticipate that we will continue to address virus related issues as needed throughout the year. This could include closing of specific classrooms, maintaining distancing, and revising protocols for schools as needed. The good news is that as a Lincoln community, we went through a difficult time last year together and came out stronger and better prepared for this year. This said, I wanted to address some of the items and concerns that I have been asked about in the last two weeks.

Masking - As you can imagine, I have been receiving emails about the masking of our children in our schools. I have read passionate pleas on both sides of the issue. Our district reentry task force met on August 5th and we will be doing so again on August 16th to discuss masking as well as the other protocols for next year. The Superintendent's Association, in our meeting with RIDOH and RIDE last week, asked for district specific metrics on the spread of the delta variant. This data, once we get it weekly from RIDOH, will be considered as we further our discussions and planning. At the moment, and as discussed at the July school committee meeting, we will likely be strongly recommending mask wearing for all vaccinated and unvaccinated persons in the schools. This mirrors the current language and direction being used by RIDOH and the Governor's office. Could this decision change based on data and the spread and proliferation of the delta variant as we head into the start of school? Yes, it could. The positive is that we still have some time to make a final decision before school begins and we will continue to consult RIDOH, RIDE and the provided data points before we make any final decisions. As a father of high school and elementary aged children, I understand not only your concerns, but also both sides of the issue. I have been communicating to state officials that it is very difficult for a populous of people (regardless of the school district) to be mask free for an entire summer while engaged in vacation activities, large gatherings, going out to eat etc.. and then be mandated to put a mask on their child in schools in just a few short weeks from now. This said, our task force is carefully listening to the experts in the field and RIDOH doctors as we try to make an informed, logical and safe decision for our children as the new delta variant continues to make this decision difficult.

Masks on School Buses and at recess - As per CDC mandate, students must continue to wear masks on the school bus. Our buses will be running at the increased capacity that was allowed at the end of last year. It is too premature to determine if elementary students need to wear masks at recess but we don't anticipate they will need to unless we are directed to do so by RIDOH.

Virtual/Remote Option - There will be no virtual or remote option for students this year unless the Governor calls a state of emergency and we need to quarantine again. We have purchased additional quantities of Chromebooks and are almost to our goal of one to one technology for our students should a student need to access Google classroom for assignments due to either quarantine or other illness.

Social Distancing - As per RIDE guidelines, we will be attempting to keep three feet of distance between all students.

Volunteers in Schools/Field Trips/Community Groups - In an effort to bring back a more normal school year for everyone, we are expecting to welcome volunteers back in our schools this year and anticipate allowing field trips as appropriate with proper safety guides in place. With respect to community groups using the facilities, we also anticipate that this will be allowed to continue as it did pre-covid albeit with safety protocols in place. We also anticipate that our before the bell program will also be operational as well.

Vaccine Clinic/Testing - As part of our reentry task force planning, our EMA director, Sean Thompson and I are planning to have another vaccine clinic at the end of August just before the start of school. Be on the lookout for information regarding the clinic soon. Once we get the date and logistics confirmed, more information will be forthcoming. With respect to testing, each school has the capacity to test students on site and we will continue to do so as appropriate. We will be sending out a testing permission/opt out form to all parents to be filled out and returned so our principals can have it on file.

Cafeteria/Physical Education/Library Media Centers - We anticipate that students will be allowed to eat in the cafeterias with adequate social distancing unless we are directed by RIDOH not to do so. We also anticipate that physical education classes will operate indoors and out as they have done in the past and library/media centers will be operational for our students to use.

Federal Covid Dollars (ESSER II and ESSER III). So far, school districts have only been able to access ESSER II dollars for planning purposes. We will use some of those dollars for purchasing high quality curriculum, supporting student learning, technology upgrades and chromebook purchases as well as identifying health and safety upgrades. We will likely be targeting the use of ESSER III monies to pay for additional health and safety upgrades which may include new, modern and efficient HVAC systems at all of our elementary schools. The ESSER III funds have not been released as of yet and there could be some additional parameters we have to work within as we plan the use of those funds for our schools.

I hope this information was helpful as we continue to plan for the return to school in a few weeks. I understand that we continue to be in uncharted territory even though we learned so much about rethinking and reworking education last year. You will likely be

getting additional, building specific updates from the school principals as we get closer to the opening of school.

Thank you, stay safe and enjoy the remaining weeks of summer.

Sincerely,  
Dr. Filippelli