

PINE PLAINS CENTRAL SCHOOL DISTRICT

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Dear Parents and Guardians:

I am writing to update you on the recent events at the Pine Plains Central Schools.

Our attention these past two weeks has been on increasing the amount of in-person learning time for our students. As an interim measure, we have added more of our special needs students to the four-day in-person format at Cold Spring ELC, Seymour Smith ILC and Stissing Mountain Jr. HS. We also included additional English Language Learners at those schools. We will be adding those groups of students to four-day in-person instruction at the high school level starting next week.

Our primary focus has been examining ways in which we can have additional in-person classroom time for all students. Our main barrier in doing so is the requirement that students in classrooms be at least six feet from one another in all directions. That requirement has been in place by both the Centers for Disease Control and the NY State Health Department. This past week, the CDC relaxed the distance requirement but only for those areas (counties) that have low or moderate infection rates. The State Health Department seems to be willing to allow that decision to be made by the local health authorities. Our Dutchess County Department of Behavioral and Community Health has told us that they support changes that would allow more in-person learning.

At this point, we are waiting for two pieces of information from the County health officials. First, does our infection rate support giving schools the necessary flexibility on distancing? Second, we need the County to verify that the State will allow them the authority to make that decision. We expect answers to those questions early next week. If the news is positive, we plan to increase the in-person learning within two weeks.

We are also exploring alternative ways to increase time for as many students as possible should we *not* get relief from the current distancing requirements. The Re-Entry Task Force met yesterday and will be meeting weekly to explore our options. It is clear that under the current restrictions, the only way we can increase the space needed and free up the staff required would be to reduce existing programs. These program reductions could include some remedial instruction, enrichment programs and some special subject classes. Given the importance of getting our students back into the school buildings, this may be a less than desirable, but necessary action. The Task Force will weigh these options at their next meeting.

Regardless of which route we take, we are planning to have a virtual meeting for parents, similar to those that were held in the fall, to explain any changes.

The last point that I will make is the critical need for cooperation from our parents and community at large. As I explained, the community infection rate will determine much of what we are able to do. Mask wearing, hand washing, social distancing and avoiding large gatherings are of the utmost importance. Just as important is utilizing our health screener and keeping your student home if they show any of the listed symptoms.

I will continue to keep you informed of our efforts.

Be well and stay safe.

Dr. Martin Handler
Superintendent

TOWNS: PINE PLAINS, MILAN STANFORD, NORTHEAST, CLINTON, DUTCHESS COUNTY:
GALLATIN, ANCRAM, LIVINGSTON, CLERMONT, COLUMBIA COUNTY