

OCEAN CITY SCHOOL DISTRICT

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March 2, 2021

Honorable Gov. Phil Murphy
Office of the Governor PO Box 001
Trenton, New Jersey 08625

Dear Governor Murphy:

The Ocean City School District Board of Education and administration continue to hear from our parents and community members that they want five days of in-person learning for all district students. We are working toward that goal, but **there is one major hurdle we must clear to be able to make this transition: the 6-foot social distancing recommendation.** We want to know if it is safe, in some instances, to reduce the 6-foot social distancing recommendation to help schools bring students back into our classrooms.

This 6-foot social distancing recommendation is preventing us from bringing students in grades 7-12 back for in-person learning five days a week. On average, our class sizes for students in these grades are too large to always allow for 6 feet of space between every student in every classroom. We don't see a clear path forward unless we receive direction from you or the New Jersey Department of Health about an acceptable range for social distancing in our classrooms. Would a range change the guideline regarding what is considered a "close contact" in a classroom setting? We worry that identifying anyone who is within 6 feet – even when all individuals are masked and facing the same direction – will mean that a whole classroom will need to quarantine if an individual tests positive and all desks are not the full 6 feet apart.

At Ocean City, we have maximized the available spaces in our Primary and Intermediate schools to bring back our youngest learners for five full days of in-person learning. We have arranged classrooms to create 6 feet of distance between each student's desk. In fact, we take 4 safety measures per classroom to help prevent the spread of illness and boost our chances of sustaining this new format: 1) social distancing; 2) mask wearing by all students and staff; 3) all student desks facing one direction; and 4) plexiglass shields for each student's desk. We also have ordered additional PPE for our teachers, including KN-95 masks and face shields.

We share these details with you to emphasize just how carefully we are balancing our responsibility to protect our students and staff from the spread of COVID-19 and provide our students with the best possible educational experience. Your March 1 announcement moving educators into a priority group for the COVID-19 vaccine makes us even more confident we are heading in the right direction in terms of striking this balance. Thank you for making our educators a priority.

Now, we ask you to revisit the recommendations for social distancing in our classrooms, as well as the companion recommendation for contact tracing in schools that consider a close contact someone 6 feet or closer for more than 15 minutes. We are aware that Indiana, Massachusetts and a growing list of other states now ask schools to aim for 6 feet of distance, but allow a minimum of 3 feet in some instances.



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We are a district that has done everything our state and county health departments have asked to keep our students, staff and community safe. However, by strictly adhering to the guidance, we are now at a standstill until that guidance evolves. **We hope you will consider revisiting the social distancing recommendations, as many other states have done, to help us get kids back into our classrooms where they belong.** They are back on the fields and courts. We want them back in our classrooms – five days a week.

Thank you,



Kathleen W. Taylor, Ed.D.
Superintendent



Joseph S. Clark
Board of Education, President