

Hello Forest Hills families and staff members.

Thanks for tuning into the 10th edition of the Forest Hills Forecast.

This week I'm pleased to share with you the draft of our return to school plan.

We sent this out earlier in the week, and we will also be following up with our full complete plan released next week.

I want to provide just a general overview and then specifics on our return to learning plan, both for the elementary level and for our secondary students grades 7 through 12.

Finally, today for our candid conversation.

I'd like to share the medical perspective that we've been receiving from multiple West Michigan pediatricians on returning to school.

So, a District overview of our return to learn plan.

We know that many districts in the area are announcing their plans and more will be doing so this next week.

These are living documents and we continue to work with all the professionals in our area whether that's the health department or the medical community or our own staff members.

We are so grateful for our teachers and our teachers are our heroes in helping us educate our children every single day.

I'll let you know that our teachers are concerned.

They're worried.

They want to see our kids. And they want to do what they always do, which is the best for our kid. But, they're also worried about all the unknowns related to this virus.

That's why it's been taking extra time for us to put our plan together and put our draft component on it at this point in time and continue to work with all of our stakeholders in the days and weeks and I'll argue months to come

this isn't something where we put a plan together now and then simply open up and not pay attention or not monitor anything

Just the opposite.

We will continue to be nimble and continue to monitor everything that is necessary for the safety and health of all of our staff members and all of our students and families.

So, we need to remain nimble.

I appreciate your flexibility as we adjusted the start date of our school year.

We will now be starting August 31st.

This additional time gives us time to prepare as a full team.

And to learn some new protocols

And relearn some traditions that we've had around the start of our school and routines

All these things are changing in a way that protects and keeps everyone safe.

So, I thank you for that and for the flexibility as we work forward to continue to launch a great school year.

I want to go into specifics now about our return to learn plan for the elementary level.

We will have two options at the elementary level. An in person model which was supported by over 70 percent of parents in our survey, and a virtual model.

We know that there are families that need this virtual option.

So, I want to provide a little bit more information on these two models

For kindergarten through sixth grade , in person

This will all be cohort learning

So, students will stay in their social group all day long

We'll minimize movement throughout the building.

They'll come to the classroom and stay there

And also go outside

We're encouraging students and teachers to take students outside. Not only for instruction, but for mask breaks, for lunch.

We want to take advantage of the great weather that we have here in this late summer and early fall.

And consistent with the latest executive order, all staff and all students at the K-6 level will need to wear a face covering while in classrooms and all common areas of the building.

We know this is an update and a change.

But we also think this will help to keep everyone safe.

And also taking the mask breaks will help people tolerate them more when we do need to wear them inside, or when we're outside and we cannot socially distance.

So, our Forest Hills virtual program.

This is something new and something we're trying to stand up for those families that really need this option.

We will be having an informational session coming up next week.

This is looking like on August 6<sup>th</sup> and we will record that session and post that for any people that might not be able to tune into it live as we're recording it.

For elementary students, this is full time virtual learning where we're asking people to make a commitment for the semester and we would be sending out to you a survey really through a Google form.

For you to make that commitment and sign up for that and you'll have to make that commitment by August 14<sup>th</sup>.

That helps us in all of the staffing work that we need to do.

We know people would love to have a Forest Hills teacher staff this virtual environment.

But if we don't have the equivalent of a classroom of students from a particular school at a particular grade level, it creates quite a significant problem for class sizes.

For all the other sections at that grade level, I know it gets a little bit complex, but we appreciate people being able to respond to this and tell us what their decision is by August 14<sup>th</sup>.

If you are looking for in-person learning, you don't need to reserve a spot for that.

It's simply for those who are looking at the Forest Hills virtual program and virtual learning program.

This will be taught by a Michigan certified teacher that will be provided by a digital curriculum partner or in the event that we have a class size of students from a particular building at a particular grade level, we would look to provide a Forest Hills teacher.

Either way, we would provide a Forest Hills staff mentor if we're working with that outside digital curriculum partner to serve as a mentor and all students would have access to any available extracurricular activities that we may have.

This will be available during any of the six phases that we could be in in the My Safe Start.

But again, we are asking families to make a commitment by August 14th.

So, we'll have much more information and details about these curriculum partners. What this looks like for our families.

So please stay tuned for that next week.

I appreciate your patience on this.

I know people are looking for information and we want to provide that all together in one spot for you.

Now, I'd like to speak to the in-person learning at the secondary level and the options that we have available there.

At the secondary level, we know that older students present differently with this virus, and with the risks that are entailed with this virus.

I'll speak a little bit more about that in my candid conversation.

We are looking at a phased-in approach for secondary learning for the first four weeks of the school year.

So, from August 31st to September 25th.

Students would come to school in only half of the groups that we would normally have so half of our enrollment at the elementary level half the number of students in classrooms.

It may not work out to be precisely 50% in every single classroom for a variety of detailed pieces, but it's going to be close.

And also, half the number of students on transportation and in the hallways at one time.

This will allow us to do far more social distancing than if we brought everyone in all at once.

And when students aren't attending in person, they would be learning in remote setting with required attendance required participation assignments grades assessments.

All those things that would go along with typical school.

That is what I mean by a more robust remote learning experience than what we had this past spring.

All staff and students at the secondary level would wear a face covering all the time while in buildings and outside if they're unable to socially distance again.

Here at the secondary level we would look to spend as much time outside as possible and also taking mask breaks as well.

It's not easy to wear a mask all day long and we want to be able to help with that by providing breaks along the way as we do that.

We know the importance of face coverings and we want to support that as best as we can.

This will take us through the first four weeks of the school year and we will use those four weeks to really monitor how the plan is working and most importantly monitor the current conditions in our area with respect to the virus.

Quite frankly, we're monitoring conditions every single day, even leading up to the start of the school year, and that's why we need to be remain nimble.

That's why the best thought thinking around our plan today, a month before school begins, may be something that also changes in the weeks to come.

I know we wish we could have that certainty but first and foremost is the safety of everyone as we go through the weeks and months ahead.

At the secondary level, for our virtual option, we're teaming up with Michigan Virtual. A partner we've worked with many times over the years.

And many of our students over the years have taken Michigan Virtual classes.

This would be a full-time engagement with Michigan Virtual with all the courses that we would typically have at the high school level including advanced placement courses as well.

Once again, a full semester commitment for this for the first semester and we would also provide a Forest Hill staff member as a mentor to make sure students are making progress along the way.

Or if they're running into difficulties, they have someone to reach out to here at Forest Hills.

Michigan Virtual is also staffed by certified Michigan teachers.

They're just not necessarily teachers who are here at Forest Hills.

Again, we'll have more information about these options for families that may be unaware of the Michigan Virtual options that have been available again, for many years.

But we'll have information sessions coming up next week on that.

Again, it's looking more and more like that will happen next week on August 6 but stay tuned for precise dates and times of that.

We will record that informational session as well.

So, you can watch that anytime. And we will post that to our website.

Finally, for those students who have special needs and more intensive needs for support.

So, students who are in our self-contained classrooms, for students with autism, students with cognitive impairments, even students in our transition program, we want to offer the option of in-person learning for these self-contained programs and to be able to do that each day of the week.

We know that students in these programs all have unique needs and unique accommodations.

So, the staff from our programs will be working with each of our families to find out what will work best for your child going forward.

Now for our candid conversation.

And the candid conversation this week is about the science that has helped us develop our plan.

We've all read many reports, and perhaps even heard conflicting reports, and we must admit that we're still, in terms of scientific data, still in earlier stages as we look at all of the information out there related to the virus and the risk factors as well.

Given that, I decided to reach out to several area pediatricians and medical professionals, in addition to the Kent County Health Department, and the health officials from the State of Michigan. And what I heard was really a consistent summary all the way through.

That while we cannot bring the risk down to zero.

That it's really important that students have the ability to come together in schools.

The benefits coming together for students academically, socially, emotionally, for their mental health, for skill development, cannot be replicated simply by itself in remote learning and there are tremendous benefits from bringing students back to school.

However, we need to do that safely.

As I explained our plan in the differentiated aspect between elementary and secondary, I had universal support from the pediatricians that I talked to about this plan understanding that we're grateful, but for reasons that are still trying to be understood, younger children do not present near as much with COVID.

And when they do contract it, their symptoms are not near as severe as what we see in the adult population.

And there's still a sense that younger children may not be as efficient transmitters of this disease.

There is some debate about that, since we haven't had young children in social settings for quite some time with the outbreak of this disease, but all the pediatricians that I spoke to, again, it was unanimous, said that they were comfortable sending their own children back to school.

For face-to-face learning, and the benefits of those face-to-face opportunities that they have, and the in-person interaction with their peers, and their teachers, outweighed the risk that do exist.

But, it's important for me to be transparent about that.

So, pediatricians are looking to send their own kids back to school, but every single family situation, every child situation can be different and we need to respect that and most importantly we need to make sure that we're all understanding that we're taking significant mitigation efforts, having masks on all day long, having protective equipment for our teachers, our teachers maintaining as much as possible social distance from our students, cohorting kids on the playground, eating lunch in the classrooms.

A variety of things are going to look different.

So, this isn't school as normal.

Even though what looks normal, our students heading back to school, everything else is different though on that.

In discussing our plan for older children with the medical community, Here, again, I had universal support for a plan coming forward, understanding that older children, secondary, middle, and high school aged students, may be more efficient transmitters of this device--of this virus.

So therefore, we need to bring in more capabilities for social distancing and that's where bringing half of the enrollment of the school or half of the enrollment of a class physically present at what time at one time helps with that physical distancing.

That is a chief mitigation strategy as well again, as face coverings and hygiene we'll be taking hand-washing breaks all throughout at all levels the sanitation on buses in classrooms in common areas.

These are efforts that we are undertaking that we've never taken before at this level and we're prepared to do so.

And I appreciate all of our team's work on this.

I'd like to thank everyone involved to date with the development of our plan thus far.

We have much more work to do.

A plan is simply something committed to writing, but executing this plan, being nimble and making adjustments to the plan that are responsive to the needs of our staff, our teachers, our families, are important things as we go forward.

And we look forward to continue to collaborate with all of our partners in this work and we'll need to be remain we'll need to remain nimble as we see where we are at this point in July to where we'll be in August and September

We'll have to continue to monitor as we go throughout the days and months ahead.

Finally, we will be providing an informational town hall meeting related to so many frequently asked questions that people have as we look at starting school in a way we've never done before we'll look to do that next week on August 5<sup>th</sup>

Again, early in the week be looking for specific information about that.

And once again, that general town hall meeting, just about our return to learning plan and all the things going on, we'll look to do that on Wednesday August 5<sup>th</sup>.



On Thursday August 6th, we will look to provide specific information on our virtual learning options for those families that have an interest in learning more.

So, stay tuned for information on how you can watch both of those Town Hall events next week.

Until then,

Thank you for all of your patience.

Thank you for your support.

And stay safe.

Take care.