

Shrewsbury Borough School

20 Obre Place
Shrewsbury, New Jersey 07702

Brent A. MacConnell
SUPERINTENDENT

(732)747-0882
Fax: (732)747-7510

Board Meeting Remarks – August 25, 2020

Good evening parents, guardians and school community members.

I wanted to take this opportunity to provide an update on the plans and preparations that we are making for the start of school on September 3rd and 4th. I know that everyone is feeling some type of excitement and probably some apprehension at our imminent return to SBS next week. I recognize that returning to school will present a series of challenges that we haven't faced before, but I sit here this evening feeling very confident that we are going to solve all of the problems of educating our children during this pandemic and that we will grow as students, parents and educators because of it.

By this time, everyone will have received an email from SBS indicating the Cohort assignments for the start of school. I want everyone to know that we have taken great effort to customize and tailor our cohorts to the needs of our students, parents, and families. I know full well how challenging this pandemic has been for families and we have done everything that we can to help our entire school community who has tried to plan transportation, childcare, and other important functions jointly. I'm not aware of any other towns in the area or on the Peninsula who have done the same for their students and families.

While there were some errors with the rollout of these emails, we did see a high level of accuracy with these assignments given that we haven't done any of this before. I do think that our school community appreciates the emphasis that we have placed on in-person instruction given the circumstances and they understand that this is a complex process. Our goal has always been to maximize in-person instruction and we can do that very effectively with our in-person hybrid model and also deliver an excellent virtual learning experience with our remote learning option. We have also worked very hard to keep our rosters balanced and for each student to have a place in a classroom should they wish to move to in-person learning. Please take a moment to review our Hybrid calendar for the year when you have a chance as there are some instances where vacations and holidays force us to deviate from the Monday/Wednesday and Tuesday/Thursday. You will also notice weeks where we replace virtual days with in-person days to give students to maximize their in-person experience.

Our Remote Learning Option and our In-person Hybrid offer the same amount of contact time and engagement. This means that parents should expect their children to report to school or to their Remote Learning classroom for each and every period of our 8 period, 12:30 day. Just like in-person instruction, virtual students will meet their teachers for two days each week on the A/B cohort schedule and receive instruction in their content area subjects utilizing the same lessons and materials as their peers in school. Our Remote Learning Option, as mandated by the NJDOE, will follow the same pacing as the in-person sections and will allow students to move between the learning options easily. We do recognize that all of this will take some extraordinary effort to make our programs successful, but I feel very confident that our faculty and staff will do an excellent job no matter what program a family chooses.

Our current policy will allow parents to notify us 15 days before the start of a new marking period, but I believe that we will be able to be more flexible to meet student and parent needs.

I know that many parents are also trying to understand and visualize what school will look like on September 3rd and 4th. I want everyone to know that our school has not completely changed but that we will be intently focused on the important precautions that we can take to keep everyone healthy and safe.

Our new school culture emphasizes social distancing, wearing masks correctly and responsibly, frequent handwashing and hygiene practices, and the use of student desk shields and other barriers depending on the area of the school. We are all safer if everyone takes these practices seriously and when we positively acknowledge the steps that we can take to keep everyone safe. My greatest hope is that we all become more conscientious members of our school community and that our efforts will lead to a healthy appreciation and high obligation to keep everyone we know safe.

I would like to give everyone a quick tour of our first day back at SBS so that parents will know what to expect.

One of the most important measures that we will take to keep everyone safe each and every day will start before the school day starts. We will be utilizing a health and wellness screener called Care Check to communicate with every family and faculty member each day. Parents and staff will respond to a series of questions that inventory the current health status of everyone coming to school that day. It is important that everyone responds truthfully and accurately to protect everyone else in our school. Care Check will allow our school nurse and I to actively monitor everyone's health each day. I remind everyone that if you feel ill or believe that you have come in close contact with someone who is sick, you shouldn't come to school that day.

Our school day for students will start at 8:15 and no students can enter the building unless they are attending the YMCA Y-Kids Before Care Program. Immediately upon arrival you will notice social distance markers around the outside of school. Please remind your children that they should maintain an appropriate social distance before entering the school and they can utilize one of our "paw prints" or other signage as a reference point. PreK and Kindergarten students will report to the K Entrance on the parking lot side of the building or the Main Entrance for Grades 1 to 8. Once we start to admit students at 8:15 AM, students will enter the building and walk through one of our infrared body temperature detectors that we have set up. Once students walk through the Safe Check unit and are cleared, they will proceed directly to their classroom where their teacher will help them get settled for the school day. Our classrooms have been set up with social distance between desks and student desk shields.

K to 4 students will remain in their classrooms for the majority of their school day. Our special area teachers will travel to these students for art, music, and other specials. Our physical education classes will be held outside if the weather permits, and receive health and wellness education inside if they can't go out.

Our middle school students will switch classes during the day. With the help of our students, we will develop and implement procedures to clean desks and avoid using any shared items during instruction and class. Students will be assigned a Chromebook to avoid cross-contamination and use their backpacks to bring and store books and other materials for school. No lockers will be used by any of our students in the middle school and we will not have our elementary students using cubbies. Everyone must bring what they will use for the day in their backpack or bag and bring that to any class that they travel to during the day.

We will work on schedules to stagger the amount of students in our hallways during passing times and have our middle school staff monitor students to encourage responsible behavior for all of our adolescent learners.

We currently expect that students will be able to use our bottle fillers on our drinking fountains but won't use our water fountains as normal. Students will travel to and utilize the restrooms individually and not as a class.

While we will not be serving lunch or enjoying recess during the school day, I know that in our elementary school grades students will need a quick snack to keep them learning. Our elementary teachers will work on procedures to clean desks after eating and to wash hands frequently.

Our maintenance and custodial staff has done an amazing job cleaning out classrooms, creating the appropriate social distance between desks and pathways in each classroom, and helping to prepare for the new school year. They have been installing flushless appliances in our bathrooms, utilizing our electrostatic foggers to clean the building, and using our UV-C obelisks as part of our regular cleaning routine throughout the building. Their routines will focus on cleaning commonly used surfaces, bathrooms, and other areas throughout the day to minimize the risk to everyone in the building.

PreK and Kindergarten orientations are scheduled for this Thursday so that students and parents can meet their teachers and learn more about what to expect when they arrive next week.

That we have done all of this with limited information and guidance from the NJDOE and NJDOH should not be forgotten. I've said this before but the key decision-makers in our state have left school districts on their own to respond to a global public health crisis.

We remain undeterred.

All of this information and additional guidance will be sent to all of our families as we get ready for next week so that everyone knows that we are indeed ready for the new school year.

I want to wish everyone an auspicious start to this school year as we embark on this new era of educating our students during the pandemic.