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To the entire Enfield Public Schools family,

I hope you and your students are taking time this summer for a much-needed break and have been able to reconnect with family and friends. It was also my hope that my first letter to you this summer would have nothing to do with COVID, but unfortunately the Delta variant and increasing caseloads have thrown us another curveball. I realize there is a lot of conversations regarding school reopening plans happening in the community (and nationwide), so I wanted to provide you this update with the information we have at the present time. Please understand that I may not answer every specific question as we are still working on a few details, but I hope this will give you all some clarification as to what the first weeks of school will look like.

In-person learning versus remote/hybrid learning—There will no longer be a remote or hybrid learning model for the 2021-2022 school year. Students who require medical accommodations and cannot attend school in-person will have alternative methods of instruction provided to them with the approval of our Pupil Services department, our Nursing Supervisor, and the district's Medical Advisor. All students not in this category will be expected to attend in-person learning five days a week. If a parent does not wish to have their child participate in school in-person, please contact central office and homeschooling paperwork will be made available.

Masks—We are currently operating under an executive order that requires everyone in PK-12 public and private schools to wear masks until September 30th, the day the executive order expires. If the Governor does not rescind this order, it will remain in effect until September 30th. Therefore, anyone operating in the Enfield Public Schools will be required to wear masks when we return on September 7th.

Vaccines—One message has been very clear: vaccines are the best protection against the virus. Maybe lost in the marketing of the vaccines is that you would be totally immune from COVID once vaccinated; that was never the case. What the vaccines did promise is that risk of hospitalization and death is nearly 100% avoidable in vaccinated individuals. I've received many questions regarding mandating vaccines. At the moment, I am not permitted to do that. This may change, but for now, I can only strongly recommend people get vaccinated.

Quarantining—Another advantage of vaccination is that quarantining is no longer required if someone is exposed to a positive case. This will help keep our buildings open and staffing issues to a minimum. There are also discussions that if students and staff members are masked, even socially distanced three feet apart, that quarantining will only be required if the exposed person is showing symptoms. I'm still waiting for confirmation of this, but this change in guidance from health professionals has played a role in the decision to require masks at the beginning of the school year. If students are required to quarantine, instructional opportunities will be provided to them to ensure there is no learning loss during the quarantine period.

Tents—Because masks will be with us at the beginning of the year, tents will again be present at our schools for the first half of the school year. This will again give principals more options for scheduling and give kids more opportunities to be outside (where masks are not required).

Social Distancing—Current guidelines state that we must keep students three feet apart while in school buildings, which is a change from the six feet strive-to guidance we had last year. With this change, we should be able to keep students appropriately spaced apart, and along with masks, help mitigate any virus spread. Further guidance on the operation of lunch will be forthcoming.

Testing—The state has asked all of us to participate in a weekly testing program for those who are unvaccinated. This program will be focused on K-6 schools since most of these students are not yet eligible for the vaccine. This program would require parental consent, and the districts only responsibility would be to provide a state approved vendor (that will be assigned to us) a consent form and a space to conduct the testing. Weekly appointments will be set-up with the schools, and the vendor will conduct the testing, submit the samples to the labs, and contact the local health department and our COVID team with the results. The testing will be the non-invasive test that only enters the bottom of the nasal cavity, not the Q-Tip that touches your brain. Once more on this program is known, we will get this information out to you. We may have the option of expanding this to preschool and the secondary level, but we're still waiting on more details.

Visitors—Because of everything I've already said, I'll be reinstituting our policy on limiting visitors to the buildings. If anyone wishes to visit a building, they will be instructed to get permission from the building principal.

Water Bottles—Good news: we can use water fountains again. Bad news: kids sticking their mouths on water fountains was gross before COVID, so we're going to ask that kids use water fountains to fill up bottles and not put their mouths on the fountains. We will be providing refillable water bottles for all students.

I realize some of you may have additional questions about specific programs related to your child. This message is not intended to answer every question as this situation is still fluid, but I hope it gives you a better understanding of what school will look like in September. Additional details will be provided in the coming weeks, and if there are any major changes to this plan, I will be sure to get that information to you as soon as possible.

As I said earlier, it was my hope that we were passed all of this, and we could get back to a more normal school environment for our kids. But as we've all learned, we don't always get to control the circumstances we are forced to live in. I understand the frustrations that many of you feel still having to deal with this reality, as I share many of these same frustrations. However, I'm reminded each day of the resilience of our staff, and most importantly of our kids, and that gives me the confidence that we will not only get through this trying time, but we will be stronger when it's over.

Thank you and stay well,

Christopher J. Drezek

Superintendent of Schools