



BERGEN COUNTY TECHNICAL SCHOOLS / SPECIAL SERVICES

District Administrative Office

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Howard Lerner, Ed.D.
Superintendent

Educational update of 10/23/2020

Dear Administration, Faculty, Staff and Parents/Guardians,

As you know, our high schools opened this week to on-site instruction of students in a hybrid schedule of half-time attendance and shortened school days. Our hope and plan were to work our way up, in terms of how long on-site instruction was provided each day and eventually to increase the number of days each student could safely attend school on-site.

As you may also know, this week has already seen individuals from two of our schools test positive for COVID-19 infection. Based on our review of these situations with the Bergen County Department of Health Services (BCDHS), and BCDHS guidance on how to address them, more than 20 students and approximately ten staff members in each instance will need to be quarantined. The challenge of covering such large numbers of unplanned staff absences (in addition to our regular absences), the invisibility and high contagiousness of COVID-19 itself, and the fact that we had two episodes of infection before the end of our first week of on-site instruction, are all factors weighing against our school buildings staying open in the near-term.

Our district is unique because we receive students from every town in the county, and we send those students back home to each of those towns at the end of the day. On a level that local districts cannot, our operational decisions can impact public health in every corner of Bergen County. We already know that COVID-19 infection and transmission rates are rising, in Bergen and in much of New Jersey. We also know that our school calendar is already full of "disruptions" from holidays in November and December; and that some of those holidays come with traditions of family and other gatherings that will add more challenges to the protection of public health.

Based on all these factors, as well as the guidance expressed by our Director/Health Officer for the Bergen County Department of Health Services last evening, and in consultation with Bergen County Executive Tedesco, I have decided to close all four Bergen County Technical District high school buildings to on-site instruction, effective Monday, October 26, 2020 through at least Friday, January 15, 2021. The instructional and student support programs in all four high schools will operate fully remotely for students, faculty, and staff during this time, as they did from September through October 2nd. In-person athletics and other co-curricular activities are suspended. Where possible, remote



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alternatives will replace them until our school buildings reopen. We will continuously monitor internal dynamics (e.g., student learning, student and staff attendance, social-emotional well-being, etc.) as well as community health conditions, and I will share updates with everyone periodically. We will assess the viability of resuming on-site instruction after the start of the New Year and communicate a formal decision prior to January 15th.

I understand the frustration and disappointment some in our school community will feel about this decision. Students should be in school; and I know that the disruptions to learning, mental health and family needs resulting from continued remote instruction are substantial. We will do everything we can to continue developing the breadth and rigor of our remote student engagement; and we will do everything possible to get students back into our schools as soon as we can do so in a safe manner...for our students and their families, for our staff and their families, and for our shared communities.

Thank you, as always, for your energy, flexibility, and commitment to excellence. With continued teamwork, we will not only “manage” this situation but find new ways to grow from it.

Stay safe and be well,

Howard Lerner, Ed.D

Superintendent