



August 30, 2020

Dear Tenafly Community Members,

We are reaching out to you about Friday's announcement of the all-virtual start to the 2020-2021 school year. We are disappointed about this shift along with much of the community. Thank you to all who have reached out to us and the Administration since the announcement. We hear your concerns and frustration.

Stakeholders from across our community – parents, students, Board members, teachers, staff, and school administrators – developed an aligned plan for the fall: an all-virtual option as well as a hybrid model. This was a demonstration of collaboration towards a common goal: to provide the best education possible for all our students given these unprecedented circumstances.

Tenafly's plan has been reviewed by the County Superintendent and is compliant in every aspect including health and safety requirements. Our plan was ready for school opening on September 8th.

By late last week, the total number of leave requests from teachers and staff exceeded 81. Sick days and leaves of absence are protected time that staff has earned and are eligible for (meeting criteria) as a benefit. The requests continue to be reviewed and managed through HR and legal. **When the number of requests exceeded 81, it became clear that we would not have enough staff to ensure the safety of our students in our schools on September 8th and therefore Superintendent DeMarco notified the community immediately.** We understand and empathize with the undue stress this late decision caused on you – our Tenafly community.

What is happening in Tenafly is part of a much larger, state-wide dynamic. As of this week, at least 180 other NJ districts such as Livingston, Millburn, Montclair, Ramapo Indian Hills and Fair Lawn have switched to an all-virtual start. Many districts are experiencing challenges of meeting the expectations of various stakeholders.

This is a pause of our plans, and we are actively working with the Administration on staffing the hybrid plan to have students and teachers back in our school buildings despite the setback. **By the end of September, the Administration intends to implement a phased-in approach through grade levels prioritizing our youngest learners at the elementary level (for both general education and special education students).** Tomorrow you will receive a communication from the Administration with further details to resume in-person instruction.

At the same time, our immediate focus is also to ensure that the virtual instruction is the best quality for our students, especially when important bonds and routines form the foundation for the rest of the school year. The virtual curriculum will be managed and monitored throughout the district to ensure effectiveness and consistency across all grades and schools. As parents and guardians, you should expect that your children will be engaged in a full-day (i.e. normal school hours) live instruction environment including breakouts/small-groups, full-classroom interactions, or independent work while virtually connected. If this is not your child's experience, please engage with your child's teachers and building principal, then reach out to Superintendent DeMarco and Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction, Dr. Mamman. If the issue is still unresolved, reach out to members of the Board.

These are extremely challenging times with no handbook. It is the opportunity to trailblaze, model and rise to the occasion through continued partnership and collaboration with you.

The Tenafly Board of Education