



**The Ridgewood News
Superintendent's Corner
September 2020
by
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School is back in session with a new look and new protocols

Six months after COVID-19 was declared a pandemic by the World Health Organization and New Jersey experienced a statewide closure of schools, our students are back in the classroom, successfully adjusting to new scheduling, protocols, and routines. The Ridgewood Public Schools opened to students on Wednesday, September 2, offering hybrid and remote models as per the guidance provided by the New Jersey Department of Education. What seemed like an impossibility only a few short months ago has become reality thanks to the early and consistent collaboration, creativity, and planning of our district restart committees, as well as the thorough preparation by our faculty over the summer. Despite the many challenges we faced--how to maximize in-person instruction time while meeting social distancing requirements, how to screen students and staff for symptoms, how to meet staffing needs, and how to provide a rich and challenging remote learning opportunity, to name a few--we developed a sound, phased-in approach. The response to the reopening from parents and students in the district has been overwhelmingly positive.

Through surveys, parent feedback at the school level, and faculty input, we learned what was successful during the spring 2020 remote learning experience and what needed to be improved. This valuable input helped to determine a framework for district summer professional development opportunities. At the 6-12 level, teachers worked in teams on collaborative unit study to reflect on remote learning, to share best practices, and to integrate new tools and options for measuring progress and demonstrating learning. For elementary teachers, the major area identified for professional growth was the integration of technology tools and strategies, particularly those for demonstration of student proficiency. Over 300 teachers engaged in these offerings, in addition to the two professional development days for all faculty that took place before the start of school. A team of over 35 counselors also met this summer to discuss the anticipated mental health needs of our students and to develop resources and strategies to support them.

Building preparations were another focus this summer, and our maintenance crew worked diligently to ensure we were on target for a September opening. Pandemic Response Teams, identified as part of the Ridgewood Public Schools Reopening and Operations Plan, are responsible for implementing and overseeing COVID-19 procedures at the school level and working to ensure consistency across the district. Before the opening of school, these teams toured the buildings to evaluate our readiness to reopen and made recommendations for any areas that needed to be addressed. These teams will continue to meet monthly, and their role will be essential to the successful transition to Phase 2 and eventually Phase 3.

One of the reasons that Ridgewood had a relatively smooth transition to all remote learning last March was because of our 1:1 Chromebook initiative, which began in the 2014-2015 school year with the high school and was gradually instituted in the middle schools. Students at the secondary level already had individually assigned



Chromebooks for at-home and in-school use, and they were adept at using technology-based instructional resources. Our Information Technology department made many advancements over the summer to meet the increased demand for video conferencing and the need for tools to facilitate all hybrid, virtual, and in-person learning, including purchasing Chromebooks for Pre-K through grade 2 students.

After months of planning and preparation, we were ready to open our doors to staff and students. So, what does fall 2020 look like at the Ridgewood Public Schools? Our students are taking a daily symptom questionnaire before arriving at school and lining up socially distanced at assigned entrances where they get a temperature check. Each building has markers on the walkways outdoors and in the hallways to help students remember to stay a safe distance apart. Classroom configurations have changed, and the flexible learning spaces now look more traditional with space between each desk or work area. It was hard to imagine managing this process for hundreds of children a day, but we have been extremely proud of our students for arriving to school wearing masks, following the new safety protocols, and showing flexibility and resilience in the face of continuous change. We continue to learn from our current experiences every day and make improvements.

We could not have accomplished this successful reopening without the partnership of our parents. Not only have they provided input which helped to inform the reopening plan, but they have also been instrumental in preparing their children for the health and safety protocols that are in place this year. Parent involvement is essential to building a strong school community. In Ridgewood, the Home and School Associations (HSA) are the primary means for parents to get involved in their child's school, support school-based activities, and stay informed and engaged about school and district initiatives. Parents are encouraged to attend HSA meetings where they can ask questions and provide direct input to the building principal. We will be sending a parent survey shortly to obtain more input on possible schedule changes in the future.

Please remember to practice social distancing, wear masks, and follow proper hygiene to help mitigate the spread of COVID-19. Also, cooperation with the local health department and individuals conducting contact tracing is vital. When someone is advised to quarantine, it is important to follow the guidelines for the full duration of the quarantine period to avoid spreading the virus to others. Everyone plays a role in keeping our community safe and healthy and our schools open.

This school year may not look like any other, but the overall consensus is that it is great to be back. Nothing about this year will be typical. We cannot predict what school will look like in three months or six months, and we may need to adjust to rapid shifts. But, it is a learning process that we are all in together, and learning is what we are all about.

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