



PORT WASHINGTON Union Free School District

MICHAEL J. HYNES, Ed.D. 516-767-5005

Superintendent

MARY M. CALLAHAN 516-767-5010
Assistant Superintendent for Business, District Clerk

Administration Building
100 Campus Drive, Port Washington, NY 11050
FAX 516-767-5007

CHRISTOPHER B. SHIELDS, Ed.D. 516-767-5050
Assistant Superintendent for General Administration

ELAINE FENICK 516-767-5050
Human Resources Administrator

DAVID MEOLI, Ed.D. 516-767-5040
Interim Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum,
Instruction and Assessment

August 21, 2020

Dear Port Washington Community,

At the August 20th Board of Education and Town Hall meeting, an announcement was made that the elementary instructional plan was changed from a 5-day in-school model to a hybrid model.

While we appreciate that many in our community, especially our elementary parents and guardians, are questioning why the district has made this decision, we hope this letter clarifies our decision-making process and what factors moved Central Administration and the Board of Education to make this change.

In June, when the district's advisory committees began work on reopening plans, the instructional task force was charged with looking at two models – a hybrid model and a remote model (for those circumstances when all schools might be closed and all students would be learning from home). At that time, prior to doing investigation of our buildings' individual space capacities, we felt a hybrid model was going to be required for all our students.

In mid-July, when Governor Cuomo set out his criteria for reopening schools, the major requirement was that a region's infection rate be below five percent based on a two-week average calculation. Long Island has consistently been at a one percent or lower infection rate. Given the fact that all indications were that we would be reopening, we began in earnest looking at all our operational plans. Our goal was to ensure compliance with all health and safety-related reopening guidance being put out by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the New York State Department of Health (NYSDOH), the New York State Education Department (NYSED), and the Nassau County Department of Health (NCDOH). At the same time, we asked our facilities department to look at our school buildings and tell us whether there was any possible way to bring all students back to a building while remaining in compliance with all health and safety related guidelines, including lowering class sizes to levels that would be needed to ensure social distancing. We understood that to do this we would need to think creatively about using all building spaces in potentially different ways, including using spaces such as gyms and all-purpose rooms for classroom space.

This analysis indicated we could bring all our elementary students back by using many of our non-classroom spaces as classrooms, but could not accomplish this under any circumstances at our middle school and high school. We also knew, based on our experiences from March through June, that it was especially important from the social-emotional and the educational perspective, as well as the childcare standpoint, that we find a way to bring our elementary students back for a five-day in-school model. Additionally, in support of the five-day, in-school model, our own elementary teachers had previously expressed concerns about the effectiveness of remote learning when teaching our youngest students without significant parental involvement. With this information, our Central Administration and elementary principals began looking at instructional models that could be used to bring all elementary students back full-time. This was the model we had originally proposed to the community and were planning on implementing when schools opened in September.

Over the past week, members of Port Washington Teachers Association communicated to both the Board of Education and Central Administration that even with all the safeguards put in place to bring children, teachers, and building staff

back safely to our elementary schools, they still did not feel safe in a five-day in-school model. We have made it clear to the PWTA as well as to the community that the health and safety of children and district staff has always been the first priority in the development of all district reopening plans.

Nonetheless, the continued reluctance to accept a five-day, in-school plan for elementary students by the PWTA, and safety concerns expressed by some elementary parents/guardians, made it clear that to ensure a smooth reopening for all elementary students we had to make the change to a hybrid model.

We fully appreciate that this decision is welcomed by some, while disappointing to others in our community. As was discussed at the August 20th Board of Education and Town Hall meeting, while we are in a hybrid model with a decreased number of students in school, we will take this opportunity to observe, monitor, and adjust our new procedures, protocols, and routines. We will further be asking our elementary instructional advisory committee to continue meeting to fine-tune the hybrid and fully virtual learning platform while utilizing those observations to look for ways to transition to a five-day, in-school plan by October 5, 2020, so long as the infection rate in our community remains within the threshold.

Our principals will be sending out communications to parents/guardians next week providing additional information regarding how the hybrid model will work for students in their buildings.

We hope this has clarified the factors and events that led the Central Administration and Board of Education to make the decision to implement the hybrid model at the elementary level.

As always, stay safe.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Michael J. Hynes". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "M" and a long, sweeping underline.

Michael J Hynes, Ed.D.
Superintendent of Schools

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Nora H. Johnson". The signature is cursive and elegant, with a large initial "N" and a long, sweeping underline.

Nora H. Johnson, President
Board of Education