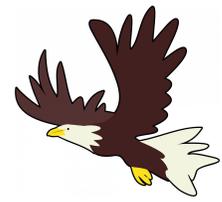


8/20/2020



Dear Union School Families,

I hope this letter finds you well and that you are soaking up as much summer as you possibly can. In two short weeks we will be back to school! We have missed our students so much and can't wait to welcome our families back for the 2020-2021 school year!

First, I want to acknowledge how challenging the spring and summer has been for parents and families and thank you again for your partnership and support as we navigate the COVID-19 pandemic. As a parent myself, I appreciate how hard it can be to make good decisions for our children in these uncertain times, and I want to thank you for your trust in me and in our faculty. There is nothing more important to us than the safety and wellbeing of your children, and whether you choose to send your students back to us in person or opt to utilize Interactive Learning from home, I want you to know that they are in the best of hands.

At our recent parent information session via Zoom ([video link here](#)) many of you asked about the safety protocols and COVID-19 mitigation strategies that would be in place to keep our community safe. Following the guidance of the State Department of Education, Farmington has developed a comprehensive Return to School plan which you can access [here](#), but I want to share some of the key mitigation strategies we will be employing:

- Staying Home When Sick:
 - All students and staff will screen daily for illness symptoms using this [Daily Checklist](#)
 - All students and staff must stay home if they are experiencing any symptoms of COVID-19, have a confirmed case of COVID-19, or have come in close contact with someone with COVID 19
 - Anyone who has traveled to a state on [CT's travel advisory](#) list must quarantine for 14 days before coming to school
- Social Distancing:
 - Established classroom cohorts of students and teachers who stay together
 - Spaces reconfigured to allow for student separation, 3-6 feet of distance
 - Assigned seats in classrooms and cafeteria
 - Staggered seating by A/B cohort to allow more open space between and around individual children
 - Floor markings and building signage to remind children about social distancing
 - Specials (art, music, gym, and library) classes held in classrooms or outdoors, for rotating blocks of 4 ½ weeks, to minimize exposure to multiple cohorts
- Cleaning and Disinfection:
 - Scheduled disinfection of student bathrooms throughout the school day
 - Nightly disinfection of classrooms
 - Cleaning and disinfection of cafeteria tables between lunch waves and playground equipment between recess times
- General Mitigation Strategies:
 - Masks or face coverings for all faculty, staff, students, and visitors
 - Individual supplies and materials for each child; no communal supplies
 - Specific practices for distribution and return of materials that must be shared (i.e., library books, guided reading books, etc.)
 - Students and staff trained and encouraged to use hygiene practices, including hand washing, hand sanitizing, and respiratory precautions

This is just a small sampling of the practices and protocols Union School will be implementing to keep our community safe. I encourage you to read more about our mitigation strategies in the Return to School and, as always, reach out to me directly with specific questions.

Another question many families asked had to do with how to get children to wear masks for long periods of time. We've been thinking about this, too! Here are a few suggestions for how to make mask-wearing tolerable for our children:

- Choose a mask your child loves! Masks are a great way to express your individuality, and wearing a fun mask with lots of personality makes wearing the mask feel like less of an imposition. Invite your child to help you choose a few masks that feel comfortable and look great!
- Remind your child that wearing a mask is a gift of kindness to others, and helps to keep friends, teachers, and our community safe and well.
- Practice wearing masks at home for increasing lengths of time. Mask wearing is an adjustment, but children and adults alike will feel more comfortable wearing them in school if they've practiced for a while beforehand.

One question I've grappled with quite a bit over the summer is how to maintain the special traditions and experiences that make Union School such a wonderful place for our students and families while maintaining safe social distance protocols. How can we come together as a community while keeping each other safe? How can children and teachers develop connected relationships when they cannot meet in person? We know that emotional wellbeing is essential to strong academic, social and personal growth, and we're working hard to find ways to keep relationships at the heart of all we do. One example of this is the **Virtual Meet and Greet Hangouts** we will set up on **Friday, August 28**. During these hangouts, students will get a chance to see their teachers face to face, talk to them, see the classrooms and begin to get excited about the year ahead. Another example is our **First Day of School Opening Clap In**. While we won't be able to gather around the flagpole as we usually do, we will be creating a vibrant opening for all children and families. When we feel a sense of loss about our special traditions and 'the way things used to be,' it's important to remember that social distancing is a way to show kindness and caring toward all people, and that it will help bring us back together as one community as soon as it is safe.

Speaking of community, we have a few new staff members to welcome:

- Caroline Galeota is joining our fourth grade team. She is coming to us having most recently taught at Braeburn School in West Hartford.
- Rachael Macri is our fabulous new school secretary. She has been working at Farmington High School as a para and has previous secretarial experience in the healthcare industry.
- Olivia Mayo will be joining our para team, coming to us from Farmington High School as well, where she was a special education paraprofessional.

I want to mention a few key events coming up in the next few weeks so you can add them to your calendar:

- **Friday, August 28th:** Virtual Meet and Greet
- **Tuesday, September 1st:** Materials Distribution for student opting for Interactive Learning at home
- **Wednesday, September 2nd:** First Day of School, **Early Release Day**, Cohort A in school; Cohort B via Interactive Learning at home
- **Thursday and Friday, September 3rd and 4th:** Cohort A Interactive Learning at home and Cohort B in school. **Both Early Release Days.**

While the past six months have certainly been challenging for all of us, I am continually inspired by our school community's ability to meet tremendous challenges with creativity, innovation and great love. I would like to invite you to be part of this collaborative work by getting involved with our Parent Teacher Organization. We are in need of new members and leaders in this organization. If you would like to serve our students by sharing your time with this committee, we welcome you!

Wishing you and your family all the best in these remaining days of summer!

Best,

Caitlin Eckler

Arrival and Dismissal

Please note: I am including this as a *draft* of our arrival/dismissal plan. If anything changes either before the first day of school or if we need to make adjustments I will send out another communication.

Buses:

8:30-8:45	Buses arrive in the bus lane
Entering building	Students arriving by bus will enter the building one bus at a time through the door at the end of the gym hallway.
Washing hands	Staff members will assist students in maintaining physical distance while washing hands in the bathrooms across from the gym (1 sink) and in the art room (3 sinks).
3:15-3:30	Buses arrive in the bus lane
Leaving building	Students will be dismissed to their buses one bus at a time in the order that buses arrive.

Parent drop-off and pick-up:

Staff will be stationed at the curb, front door, and directly inside front door

8:30-8:45	Students with last names A-K arrival
8:45-9:00	Students with last names L-Z arrival
3:15-3:30	Parent pick-up students remain in the classroom until all bus students have been dismissed.
3:30-3:45	Students with last names A-K are dismissed to the front hallway , designated waiting areas for parent pick-up. Parents line up at the front door and students are dismissed by family.
	Students with last names L-Z go to the gym , designated waiting for parent pick up. Parents line up at the gym door and students are dismissed by family.

EXCL: Students arriving and departing from/to EXCL will be escorted by EXCL staff members.