

GENERAL BROWN CENTRAL SCHOOL DISTRICT

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www.gblions.org

April 29, 2021

Dear General Brown Community,

As you know, last month we requested information from families in anticipation of the New York State DOH releasing updated guidance regarding social distancing in schools. We collected that data and used it to anticipate and identify what options, if any, could be instituted district-wide to bring more students back to in-person instruction than our current hybrid model of instruction allows. We have studied the updated guidance and evaluated our current status in all three schools. We recognized right away that we were unable to consider bringing remote-only students back this school year. We then turned our efforts into studying the reality of bringing back more students from the hybrid model of learning. We have considered district-wide options, PK-6 options, PK-2 only options, half-cohort return options, and alternating cohorts for some type of in-person instruction on Wednesdays options. Unfortunately, I must report that at this time, we are unable to accommodate any significant changes to the current model of instruction. The biggest barriers we face to date include:

Transportation: In order to maximize capacity on the buses, we knew we needed to increase the number of students riding on each bus run. We are responsible for providing transportation to any child that needs it. Currently, 11 out of 16 buses are running at full-capacity with only siblings from the same household sitting together. That only leaves 28 additional seats to accommodate half of our student population.

Classroom Capacity: 8 classrooms at BGP in all grade levels cannot accommodate full hybrid classroom enrollment with 3 feet between students. We considered finding alternative spaces to hold classes, which would displace other classes and teachers, and we considered creating new classrooms. That would require displacing elementary children from their current classrooms and teachers with less than 10 weeks left in the school year.

Lunches: Students could not remain in classrooms to eat their meals. We would need to utilize the cafeterias more, and part of the gyms would still need to be used for feeding children. This is not ideal for PE instruction, especially on inclement weather days. This would also disrupt our student supervision schedule.

School Schedule: The schedule at the JSBS changed for this year only so that students are dropped off almost 30 minutes later than a typical school year. This allows for adequate supervision. Additionally,

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the buses must be cleaned between each run. With the later start, time to clean buses, and extra time added to each route to pick up additional students from the other cohort, the instructional day at both elementary schools would be delayed by almost an hour, thereby, losing instructional time. Additionally, district families and employees would need to rearrange their children's schedules with child care, as well as their own work schedules.

Wednesday In-Person Instruction: We are currently instructing 256 students with remote-only instruction, which is almost 20% of our student population. Teachers connect with remote-only students on Wednesdays, hold classes and office hours for all children, prepare and post lessons and videos, contact families, attend professional development that would otherwise pull them out of classrooms, and attend Committee on Special Education (CSE) meetings for children. Wednesdays allow teachers to meet the academic and social/emotional needs of students from team A, team B, and remote-only instruction.

I am in regular contact with all the school districts in the North Country region. Each district has unique circumstances that determine what is and isn't feasible. Some smaller districts have been able to accommodate 4 or 5 day instruction all year long. We simply don't have that much extra space or staff. Other larger districts are bringing *some* students back on alternating (or every) Wednesday, but they did not offer the 100% fully-remote instruction option to all families. Others have many more walkers, and their buses are not already at capacity.

While we could find some type of resolution to all of these challenges listed above, collectively, we cannot find a solution to meet the needs of all. It should be noted that since January, district-wide, General Brown has brought back 176 students for hybrid and/or 3 or 4 days of instruction. Additionally, principals have been asked to maximize each bus run and classroom capacity given the confines of the bus routes. While not ideal for the larger population, we are still meeting the needs of more students than we were previously doing last fall. Moreover, teachers and administrators have created credit-recovery options (during and after school) and are exploring more ways to fill learning gaps for the remainder of this year and into the summer. Once more guidance is released by federal government and the NYS Education Department on stimulus funds, we will be announcing more initiatives to support the academic and social/emotional needs of children.

We are optimistic that we will return to full in-person instruction in September, and we are confident that many of the restrictions listed above will be resolved. Throughout this school year, we have made decisions that seemed best for students given the circumstances and guidelines we were working with at the time, but such decisions prevent us from making drastic, widespread changes now. We have learned much from this school year, and we will continue to improve daily. I am proud of the accomplishments we have made so far, and I, too, look forward to the halls and classrooms being filled with children! As always, please feel free to reach out to me for any clarifications or with questions. Principals will be announcing soon the end-of-year schedule for academics, as well as special events such as moving up days and celebrations. We realize that it's too soon to return to normal, so we look forward to sharing virtual and/or smaller outside special events to make this year memorable nonetheless.

Sincerely,

Barbara J. Case
Superintendent of Schools

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