



Mountain Lakes School District Office of the Superintendent

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Dear Mountain Lakes Learning Community,

In the short time that I have served as your Superintendent, many of us witnessed and participated in a Herculean effort on the part of this learning community to honor every aspect of our plan to reopen schools. In the face of shifting guidance and, at times, ambiguous recommendations, we have forged ahead to meet each changing circumstance as outlined during our [August 17th board presentation](#).

Working closely with the Mountain Lakes Education Association, we have evaluated the numerous requests for staff accommodations under the Families First Coronavirus Response Act (FFCRA), Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, Americans with Disabilities Act and the Emergency Family and Medical Leave Expansion Act (EFMLEA). Under guidance from the Governor's Road Back Plan released in June, we have developed many creative solutions to personal circumstances, understanding that certain individuals may have increased risk factors that would cause them to choose not to return to in-person instruction.

The impact of these requests, along with the expanding need for childcare brought about by other districts' decisions to implement virtual instruction, particularly at the high school level, has brought us to the point where we can no longer provide the quality of instruction that the Mountain Lakes community demands for its students. I regret to inform you that, as of this date, it is simply not possible to overcome our significant staffing issues in time for the opening of school at Mountain Lakes High School.

While we remain committed to in-person instruction at Wildwood, Briarcliff and Lake Drive Schools, the decision has been made to start the school year at Mountain Lakes High School in an all-virtual format. This new reopening plan includes a transition to a full-length, full-class period "remote" school day. High school athletics and extracurricular activities will be promoted as a means of providing the necessary student-to-student interaction that we will temporarily be missing in our high school classrooms. Our goal is to implement in-person instruction at MLHS just as soon as conditions for our return are met. Regular updates will be provided in relation to this transition plan.

As disappointing as this decision is, please know that it was arrived at collaboratively and only after prolonged and thoughtful consideration of numerous factors. Our new “all-virtual” [schedule](#) has been further developed since the early days of the pandemic and will include robust levels of synchronous instruction and interaction between students and staff. Keeping our talented educators connected to every pupil will be the guiding principle of the high school’s virtual plan and targeted staff training will help ensure that the virtual experience is responsive to the needs of each learner.

Our new plan will be submitted to the Department of Education where it will undergo further inspection and scrutiny. As you can imagine, I haven’t slept much since my arrival. I accept this hazard of the job. I also accept that the decisions I make will be questioned, and rightly so. My only ask is that we remain mindful of the critical connection between school and community and the importance of its nurturance. Our learning community is worthy of this collective effort.

Sincerely,

Michael J. Fetherman
Superintendent of Schools