



# Hopatcong Borough Schools

**Dr. Joseph S. Piccirillo**  
*Superintendent of Schools*

**Learning Today. Leading Tomorrow.**

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January 4, 2022

Dear Hopatcong Community,

Since the start of the school year I have been committed to keeping our schools open. Students need to be in school. The interruptions of the last two years have been detrimental to so many students, families, and staff members in so many ways. While the guidance from the NJDOH and NJDOE has sometimes made schooling difficult, cumbersome, and unorthodox due to various restrictions and protocols for quarantines, we have done our best to persevere and to provide the highest quality education possible in the safest possible environment. Unfortunately, I am sharing this letter to inform you that due to significant challenges resulting from staff absences, quarantines, and isolations, we are no longer able to adequately provide effective programming or supervision for our students. Therefore, after consultation with the Sussex County Department of Health and the Sussex County Department of Education, I have made the difficult decision to pivot our school district **completely to virtual instruction on Thursday, January 6 and Friday, January 7.**

The decision to “go virtual” is a painful one. I recognize the difficulties this presents teachers and students and, as a father of young children, I also know the difficulties this causes parents. Having said this, yesterday we had 55 staff members out and today we had over 60 staff members out. In some instances we were able to secure substitute teachers, consolidate classes, or make other arrangements, but the majority of the positions vacated have remained unfilled. We are simply not able to sustain appropriate instruction and supervision under these circumstances.

It is my hope that by Monday, January 10 we will return to school for in-person learning, as that will provide us adequate time to get our quarantined and isolated staff members back. I will plan to communicate with the community again by Sunday, January 9, to confirm that we are indeed returning on Monday or to provide additional information if necessary.

This decision to go virtual is due to lack of appropriate staffing, however, let there be no mistake, the COVID numbers are very high. The Sussex County Department of Health shared with me that we have had 610 new cases in the county just within the past 24 hours; and there are likely many more positives left unreported due to folks taking at-home tests.

It is important that we all continue to work together and be vigilant about checking each day for symptoms – regardless of your vaccination status. Please refer to our website for our screening form. Of course, being vaccinated, boosted, masked, and checking for symptoms still does not completely remove the risk of COVID spread in schools. Even with our additional cleaning procedures, new air filtration systems, and the other mitigating factors previously listed, there is still always the possibility of spread and the possibility of asymptomatic carriers.

So what can be done? When does this all end? Not this again!!!

Trust me, I have the same questions and I share in your frustration. For now, we must continue to follow our guidelines from the NJDOH and NJDOE. Many have asked me whether we are following the new CDC guidelines. We are not. They do not apply to schools. Since the start of the pandemic we have followed guidelines from the NJDOE and NJDOH along with the vast majority of NJ school districts. The NJDOH and NJDOE may soon change the recommendations to reflect a closer following of the CDC but for now, the quarantine and isolation timelines remain the same as they were listed in my December 17 correspondence. Namely, if you are not fully vaccinated and you are identified as a “close contact” you must quarantine for 10 days. You may “test out” of quarantine if you receive a negative test (on Day 5-7) in order to return as early as Day 8. While we prefer a PCR test, we recognize that tests are hard to come by and will accept an at-home test. If you are isolating due to testing positive for COVID, your isolation period is 10 days.

Tomorrow, Wednesday January 5 will be live and in-person. This will give families a chance to make child care arrangements and will give our teachers a chance to ensure that students have appropriate materials for virtual school on Thursday and Friday. If there is snow on Friday – which the latest forecast suggests there may be – we will still have school remotely. (*Schools are not able to pivot to virtual due to snow, but this will not apply to us because we are pivoting to virtual due to staffing concerns resulting from COVID.*)

This entire situation continues to be fluid and I will communicate with you all if and when I receive more information that impacts any future decisions. In the meantime please communicate with your child’s school nurse about symptoms and concerns over exposure and please await further direction from your child’s teacher and/or school administrator on how to access online learning for Thursday and Friday. Thank you for your understanding and your patience during this difficult time.

Sincerely,



Dr. Joseph S. Piccirillo