



Pearl River School District

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Marco F. Pochintesta, Ed.D.
Superintendent of Schools

March 8, 2021

Dear Pearl River School District Families,

In the last few weeks, we have seen very promising developments that support the movement towards a full re-opening of our schools. Based on these developments I project that we will be able to have a full return to in-person learning by April 19, 2021, pending approval by the New York State Department of Health (NYSDOH) of our revised plans for re-opening. Remote learning, in keeping with State mandates, will remain an option for families that want to continue in this model.

We are preparing for a full return to in-person learning by adjusting our classrooms to conform to a less restrictive social distancing configuration, with the use of barriers. The NYSDOH, and the CDC ([latest guidance issued for schools](#)) have indicated that schools must socially distance 6 feet or have a physical barrier in place. NYSDOH guidance states the “use of appropriate physical barriers between individuals that do not adversely affect air flow, heating, cooling, or ventilation, or otherwise present a health or safety risk. If used, physical barriers must be put in place in accordance with the United States Department of Labor’s Occupational Safety and Health Administration guidelines and may include strip curtains, cubicle walls, code compliant materials, or other impermeable divider or partition.”

As more districts move towards a full return it is possible that the NYSDOH will issue additional guidance in greater detail about social distancing in schools. There are questions about the use of face shields in lieu of barriers. A variety of barriers exist and, some of the models that are appropriate for classroom settings are a three-sided plastic shield that can be mounted on a desktop or carried from class to class. The use of a face shield could be an option for students, providing advantages for visibility and comfort in the classroom setting while having no detrimental impact on air flow in the classroom. We understand changes to social distancing requirements may impact a family’s decision to choose remote learning or in-person instruction. In order to inform our planning and advance our preparedness we are asking parents to complete this survey by 5 PM, Friday, March 12th. <https://forms.gle/oxRQ4JvgCGut3YZ68>

Supportive factors for a full return:

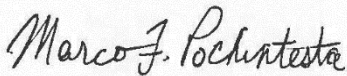
- The COVID -19 vaccination initiative’s focus on workers in an educational setting has resulted in a majority of staff receiving full vaccination or at least one dose;
- Changes in Rockland County Department of Health ‘s quarantine guidelines have reduced the number of days and the number of students and staff that would need to quarantine when a new case is identified;

- The District's internal capacity for a full return has progressed measurably March 3rd, students in Kindergarten through second grade started receiving up to two hours of remote synchronous learning on Wednesdays. February 24th, students from grades 3 and 4 started receiving a third day of in-person learning each week. March 10th, students in grades 5 through grade 7 will have two additional in-person days each month per cohort;
- Low COVID-19 transmission rate in schools;
- Lower community infection rate, currently 4.61% ; and
- [Recommended by the American Academy of Pediatrics, New York Chapter](#)

The changes previously mentioned, along with our existing practices and protocols that will remain in place (masking, sanitizing, social distancing whenever possible, daily screening) have positioned us well for a full return to school.

Despite the need for clear guidance that would address any uncertainty on questions such as face shields or barriers, we are excited about the prospect of a full and safe return to in-person learning for all students and families who wish to participate. Please expect to hear more from the District on a full return to school in the days and weeks ahead as we continue to progress towards that goal.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Marco J. Pochintesta". The signature is written in a cursive style and is located on a light gray rectangular background.