

SOUTH BRUNSWICK TOWNSHIP PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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March 11, 2021

Dear South Brunswick School Community,

Today marks one year from the day that we closed the schools for what presumably would be a 2-week stint. As we all know, 2-weeks turned into the remainder of the year and then continued into the 20-21 school year. My memory of these initial days is all too vivid and this day certainly brings back how it all began one year ago.

For those that may recall, you received a robocall at around 6:00 AM on March 11th cancelling school for the day. We had received information the night before that one of our students may have been exposed to Coronavirus. To make a long and painstaking story short, we made the decision to close out of an abundance of caution and later found out that the case we had been informed about was in fact our first case in South Brunswick and part of a larger outbreak in a neighboring town. Without getting into detail the night of March 10th into the morning of March 11th is a period of time I will not soon forget.

While March 11th was our first day of closure, you may also recall that we called for an early release day on March 9th in order to prepare for what, at the time, was a precautionary measure should we have to close due to the Coronavirus. Our staff worked feverishly to plan for what at the time was a relatively foreign concept - "Remote Learning". The rest is history as today we mark a year of remote learning, and while it is not our first choice in educating children, it is something that our school community has demonstrated can be done and can be done at a high level!

Looking back on the year that began with confusion, fear and forced learning of a whole new way of educating students. Nothing has been easy, nothing has been without consequence and while we have stayed strong as a community, the aftermath will require us to band together in the coming months. We will need to stay strong and pull together as one community. Yes, there are different perspectives and no necessary correct answers, but one thing is for certain - we will be a better community for our students, families and faculty if we can find common ground, empathy and understanding. We may all have different needs, different ideas but most importantly we all want the same thing - to be healthy, safe and able to have our students educated at the highest levels. This is what will get us through the next phase in what is hopefully a post-pandemic world very very soon!

The Early Days... March was one long month!

March 2-8, 2020

- We met with the Office of Emergency Management to prepare just in case there were to be an outbreak. We posted a link on our website from the CDC to answer any questions and concerns.
- Rich Hoff, Chief of the Monmouth Junction First Aid Squad joined us at the BOE meeting to discuss the process of when they receive a call for EMS and answered any questions and concerns.
- I reached out to families giving an update regarding the Coronavirus and the district's efforts to ensure the health and safety of all students and staff in our buildings and that we are updating our

plans which include the preparation for remote learning should it become necessary or directed by the State of NJ.

March 9, 2020

- South Brunswick calls for an early release day so that staff could begin planning for this thing called “remote learning.” [Click here to view photos of the District planning for Remote Learning.](#)

March 10, 2020

- State of Emergency declared and the CDC continues to provide updated guidance to schools. State of Emergency did not equate to school closure. Guidance from the CDC and DOE was to prepare for the possibility of a “school dismissal” meaning schools being closed but maintaining student learning. Planning for remote learning was shared with families on the full build out of the educational learning that will be in place in the event of a “school dismissal”.
- Late on this evening, we received word that we may have a case of Coronavirus in the schools. 8-hours of tracking, phone calls and attempts to learn more from the Health Department ensued with no avail.

March 11, 2020

- **At approximately 5:40 AM I finally received a return call from the Health Department, in this case it was from the Commissioner of Health, Judi Persachelli. After my discussion with her, I determined that our safest course of action was to close the schools until we learned more about the potential case and who may have been exposed. Later in the day, we were finally able to confirm that we did indeed have a case of Coronavirus in the Township and the School District. With so little information, this news sparked concern and fear. We acted cautiously and took the day while the schools were closed to build-out a 2-week model for remote learning. Little did we know then, what 2-weeks would turn into.**
- **Families were notified of exposure in South Brunswick, *“While we await further information on this evolving situation, we will be closing the schools to ensure we are being as safe as we can be for our community. We are working hand in hand with the police and health department to get the best information available and they just need more time, therefore the closure gives us this in a safe way.”***
- **We further shared, *“Late last night we learned of the potential exposure of two of our residents. The situation continues to evolve as two members of the South Brunswick community are currently being evaluated for COVID-19. The two people include a SBHS student and an adult in the community. Both of these residents are under self-quarantine and being monitored closely by the health department. To add context, a few weeks ago, these individuals were at an event in Princeton that was associated with 5 other presumptive positive cases. Obviously, this gave us pause and remains an important element to our decision making. While the SB residents have not been cleared or found to be positive, precautions remain a priority. Remote learning allows us to maintain continuity, provides for instruction and will be a model of what is possible in today’s technological age, while keeping our community operating safely.”***
- **We immediately sprung into action with Chromebook distribution, lunch plans for our students and all out communication structures for all stakeholders.**

March 12, 2020

- First day of remote learning that we were pretty confident would only last a couple of weeks. OOPS, misjudged that one by a smidge!

March 16, 2020

- Governor Murphy has made the decision to close schools for the next two weeks. A little late in the game, but you know South Brunswick, always the trend setter!
- Lunch programs were in full swing.
- Almost every student had a Chromebook and internet access, or at a least a plan to get there.

March 24, 2020

- Governor announced that schools will be closed indefinitely until further notice.
- Governor announced NJ has applied for a federal waiver to cancel all NJ standardized testing for students.

March 27, 2020

- Governor announced school statewide will remain closed for the foreseeable future and the question will not be revisited until at least April 17th.

May 5, 2020

- Governor announces that schools will stay closed for the remainder of the 19-20 school year.

May 25, 2020

- The tragic death of George Floyd sparked a national movement.

June 18, 2020

- Class of 2020 Diploma Pick-Up Motorcade was held at the high school. Of course, we had to deal with rain but were prepared with tents, by the end of the day the sun was shining brightly.

June 22, 2020

- Virtual Graduation Ceremony premiered

The Summer - Will we get back to normalcy?

July 2020

- Planning and more planning. A month normally associated with calm, vacations and a mild slowdown was now in full gear with not a second to spare. Staff worked non-stop in planning and prepping for what would become the 20-21 school year.

August 2020

- 75% of the community elected to keep their children home for remote learning and informed the district they would not be sending their children into the schools.
- August was ridden in changes and more changes as rules and regulations were sent down from Trenton. Forums and presentations were commonplace in this month as we made plans, changed plans and tried to adjust to the everchanging Covid landscape.

The 2020-2021 School Year

September 2020

- Schools open in remote with the creation of Remote Learning Centers (RLC's) where some students came to school to do their remote learning.
- Later in the month some of our self-contained classes began coming to school for in-person learning.

October - November 2020

- Work continued to bring the district back to in-person.
- There was a good deal of controversy as determining what was right and safe was not always clear. These were long months as the district went back and forth on when to open the schools.
- It was ultimately determined to return to in-person learning two weeks after the winter recess.

January 2021

- While schools were preparing to open, large spikes in Covid were being reported and the opening was pushed off until February 1st. Little did we know that we would get an early April Fool's Day prank!!!

February 2021

- 1ST-3RD - THE REOPENING IS DELAYED AS WE WERE SLAMMED WITH A SNOWSTORM - NO IN PERSON LEARNING - UGH!!!
- February 4th - Schools re-open for in-person learning - YAY!!!
- JUST KIDDING - SLAMMED WITH ANOTHER SNOWSTORM!

March 2021

Here we are in March and things are running smoothly one year later. Covid numbers are declining and the outlook is bright. We are now gearing up for a second tier re-entry with those students who will now be joining for in-person learning.

In closing, what comes to mind is the lyrics to [525,600 Minutes](#) ...*Five hundred twenty-fix thousand, six hundred minutes. How do you measure, measure a year. In daylights, in sunsets, in mid nights, in cups of coffee. In inches, in miles, in laughter, in strife... how do you measure a year in the life?* I will choose to measure this past year in memories, experiences and the resilience of this great community. I will measure it in partnerships that were formed and by the challenges we overcame. Ultimately, I will measure it in the silver linings we will identify and those things that have made us stronger. I will also measure this past year by our losses and mistakes. We cannot discount what has been lost, just as we cannot discount what has been gained. Many have lost loved ones and have suffered in one way or another. For all of those losses and challenges faced, my heart goes out to the families.

We now are in the beginning stages of what I know will be something special. How will education change for the future? What have we learned about ourselves that we can use to better our society? What lies ahead? I am hopeful and optimistic for our future, but mostly I am proud. I am proud of our students who have endured so much and I know will come out on top - they have been truly amazing and continue to be each and every day. I am proud of our families who also have endured, each taking a crash course in the teaching profession! I am incredibly proud of our staff that stepped up in a way that will forever be

remembered as something miraculous. It is March 2021, one year to the date of when it all began. Our path is bright and I know the future will be how this last year is truly measured.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a series of loops and a horizontal line extending to the right.

Scott