



# Mount Sinai Union Free School District

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August 13, 2020

Dear Mount Sinai Community,

I am sure that many of you believed that we would be fully returning to school this fall. I know I did. I wanted the nightmare of the closure of schools to be over. We spent the summer waiting for Governor Cuomo to give us permission to open. Finally, last Friday, August 7, the Governor stated based on the State's COVID-19 infection rates, schools may open this fall but must follow the guidelines put forth by the CDC and the Department of Health. Simply put, we must follow the guidelines of social distancing. This restriction impacts our District.

The elementary school had extra classrooms that could be utilized to accommodate social distancing requirements. Students do not move from class to class and throughout the building. Their special classes, like art and music, will also take place in their classrooms. Students will also be eating lunch in their rooms. This is why desk shields make sense in the elementary school. Only one student will be sitting in that desk four days per week. These desk shields will be cleaned nightly by custodial staff.

The secondary level poses different issues. Students move through crowded hallways between every class period. Because of their schedules, students move to at least seven or eight different classrooms per day. The majority of the rooms in the high school are used constantly throughout the day. Class sizes in the elementary school are smaller than in the high school. Often we find high school classes with twenty-five students, which makes social distancing impossible. Already we have repurposed the auditoriums, libraries, and gymnasiums. The Department of Health requires a distance of twelve feet between students for band, chorus and gym classes.

Due to the constraints of social distancing and lack of space, in order to provide safety for staff and students we are forced to open with a hybrid model, which means half of the student population attends school for in-person instruction for two days per week and then receives remote teacher led lessons for two days per week. Teachers will also be reporting to work on Wednesday to communicate personally with students who are receiving their instruction remotely at home. They will also be planning and recording lessons as needed. Mount Sinai polled its teachers and administrators to determine which hybrid schedule they favored. The choice was an AA-BB schedule or an AB-AB pattern of attendance. The majority of administrators and teachers chose the AA-BB schedule. What is appealing about this structure is that it offers a block of two days to meet in person with students. Teachers felt that it gives them the opportunity to introduce and teach the concepts on the first day, then on the second day they can check for understanding, reinforce the first day of instruction, and inform students of what they will be doing remotely during the next two days of instruction.

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The District is looking at this hybrid schedule as a safe transition back into school. Many students, as well as teachers, struggled to get through the close of school. Teachers and students have not been in a classroom since mid-March. I am hearing from numerous parents about the anxiety their child is experiencing and the anxiety they feel about returning their child to school. There will be a considerable amount of students who will not be returning in September due to health risks or not feeling safe. I have received letters from parents who feel that we should begin the year completely online. Others have written saying that they are grateful that we are opening slowly and carefully. Then there are others who will only be satisfied with a full opening with all students attending. No matter what the District decides, not everyone will be happy.

Mount Sinai is not the only district using the AA-BB hybrid model. Many other local districts are as well, such as Miller Place, Rocky Point, Longwood, Middle Country, South Country, Patchogue-Medford, Center Moriches and William Floyd.

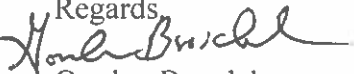
As I said earlier, this hybrid schedule is a beginning, a transition back. We hope to be open-minded and flexible. I hope that our District remains COVID-19 free, without staff or students getting hit by the virus. Should the numbers remain low in our region and more students return to in-school learning for the second semester, I would like to start using Wednesdays, on a rotating basis, meaning that the A group will have three days of in-person instruction the first week and the B group would experience those days of in-person instruction the next week. Eventually, if things remain safe, I hope that the Department of Health and Governor allows us to fully open.

I informed the community previously that the District upgraded its remote learning guidance. All three buildings will be using Google Classroom and the resources it offers, such as Google Meets. Our teachers have been trained and we are offering parent workshops this week. Google training for teachers will be ongoing throughout the year. Parent Google tutorials are already posted on the District website.

A detailed description of our remote learning process will be posted on the website tomorrow, Friday, August 14, 2020.

I thank the community for its patience and understanding. We will be monitoring our hybrid schedule and remote learning process throughout the year and make upgrades as deemed necessary.

Please be safe.

Regards,  
  
Gordon Brosdal  
Superintendent of Schools