



NEWTOWN PUBLIC SCHOOLS
3 Primrose Street
Newtown, CT 06470

OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDENT
(203) 426-7620
FAX (203) 270-6199

BUSINESS OFFICE
(203) 426-7618
FAX (203) 426-2368

August 31, 2021

Good Afternoon Parents and Caregivers,

We are so happy to be back at school for the beginning of what I know will be a terrific new year. As I visited schools yesterday, I was truly overjoyed to see the smiles on the faces of students, staff, and building leaders alike. I thank you all for your patience and understanding with respect to transportation, as we continue to smooth the edges so that our buses run smoothly and on time. Today, for example, showed improvement in the timing of buses arriving at schools - and we are only on Day 2. I have to thank the diligence of our staff and building leaders who work with students and families for a safe arrival and departure from our schools.

On another note, I wanted to clarify flexibility that DPH has given to school districts alongside recommended mitigation strategies and in concert with the Governor's Executive Order 13A. All staff and students are required to be masked, both in school and on public transportation. Recently, in that same guidance, the DPH outlined flexibility for *vaccinated* teachers during necessary components of a lesson (active instruction such as clarifying concepts, providing pertinent information, etc.) and only when distanced at the front of a classroom. This was defined as flexibility and in no way signals an "optional mask" policy for teachers. A communication that went out to our faculty addressed the importance of role modeling proper mask use for all students, as well as the need for students to have mask breaks throughout the day.

While we continue to implement mitigation strategies as they are recommended, we are equally mindful of the integrity of in-person instruction so that students have a much stronger foundation this year following the myriad of obstacles they encountered as learners over the last 18 months. There is absolutely no question that safety remains a priority, and our staff has done an incredible job of this throughout the pandemic.

We also need to distinguish between the schools, which have been under the Governor's Executive Order, and municipalities who were given flexibility in making decisions around masks. We continue to follow the guidance coming from the State of CT, which remains an integral part of our Return to School Plan. As I stated clearly when we presented our plan, we will continue to monitor local health metrics, review in-school data, and work closely with our health director to make appropriate, reasonable changes or implement flexibilities as we are permitted to do in the future. Please feel free to contact me at work 203-426-7621 to ask questions or clarify information. Thank you, as always, for your partnership with our district.

Dr. Lorrie Rodrigue, Superintendent