



Dear Mahwah Community,

We, the members of the Mahwah Education Association, began this summer hoping for a safe return to school in September. We miss being in school and we miss our students. We miss helping them, laughing with them, and seeing them grow as students and people.

Throughout the summer we have continually worked to try to make a safe return to school a reality. Several members of the MEA collaborated with parents, administrators, and Board of Education trustees on the district's reopening task force trying to craft a plan to return to school in person. Separately, members of the MEA Executive Team met several times with the Mahwah Administrative Team to share and discuss concerns and questions about reopening. We have appreciated the opportunity to have a voice in this process and said as much in our remarks during the August 5th Board of Education meeting when the district's plan was presented.

After the district's reopening plan was finalized and presented to the Board, the MEA conducted a critical analysis based on the "Anticipated Minimum Standards" set forth in the [state's guidelines](#). Mahwah's plan is comprehensive but does not thoroughly cover all of these standards. We found several areas that need to be further addressed in order to reopen safely.

We shared these concerns in person and via email on August 12th with the Superintendent, Assistant Superintendent, Curriculum Director and the Director of Special Services. While the MEA leadership has not received any response at all from the Mahwah Administrative Team, we were pleased to see that some of our concerns were addressed in a [revised plan](#) that was posted on August 18th.

However, in order to meet all of the state's minimum guidelines, which are informed by CDC health standards and ensure a safe in-person reopening of schools, we are asking that the district still address the following:

1. Clean all classrooms before new groups of students enter and have all cleanings performed by properly trained custodial staff according to CDC and OSHA guidelines.
2. Maintain documentation of all cleaning and make readily available for review.
3. Do not put staff at risk by requiring them to be physically in the buildings when deep cleaning is occurring.
4. Provide documentation of rooms with recent HVAC work orders and the corrective maintenance performed within the last year.
5. Inspect all HVAC units every other week after school starts to ensure continued functioning and provide documentation of inspections.
6. Have the HVAC system run at 100% for two hours before and after any occupied time.

7. Produce the results of the analysis/inspection of heating and ventilation systems in every room/instructional space that will be used providing/proving recirculated air has a fresh air component and filters for A/C units are maintained and changed according to manufacturer recommendations.
8. Provide a written procedure and schedule for cleaning/sanitizing buses between routes.
9. Produce documentation of training on manufacturer's instructions for all cleaning and disinfection products for employees who will perform cleaning and disinfecting as part of their job responsibilities.
10. Create a written plan for all rooms and instructional spaces to comply with social distancing standards to the maximum extent practicable. (This should include not only side-to-side spacing but also front-to-back spacing).
11. Create a written plan to limit the use of shared objects and cleaning procedures between use delineated by course/grade level. (Some courses/grade levels have been addressed such as elementary book sharing and high school science labs, but not all; for example, shared objects in pre-school and materials in middle school and/or high school art, woodworking, and robotics).
12. Develop a written protocol to prohibit the sharing of equipment for grades 6-12 physical education, or, if equipment must be shared, a written protocol and schedule to clean and disinfect between use.
13. Develop a written plan and schedule for students to wash hands for at least 20 seconds at regular intervals as outlined in DOE guidance.
14. Create a written plan for the process and location of the staff and student screening area.
15. Create a written policy for screening students and employees upon arrival for symptoms and history of exposure that includes specific reference to students with disabilities and accommodations that may be needed in the screening process, as well as address the procedure for when a parent/guardian/student refuses to complete the attestation form.

We understand the difficulty of the situation for the administration. They were tasked with creating a safe reopening in the midst of a pandemic and without substantial support from the state or federal government.

The MEA has worked hard to foster a positive relationship with the administration and the Board of Education and we are proud of the collaborative and collegial negotiations that resulted in the settlement of a four-year contract last year. We don't want to see the challenges posed by reopening schools set us back as a district.

For these reasons, our approach has been to join advocacy efforts at the county and state level while seeking to work with administration to create the safest reopening possible in this district, recognizing that they were following the original state mandate for an in-person opening.

To that end, the MEA joined 70 other local associations in the county in co-signing a [letter](#) written by the Bergen County Education Association to the County Superintendent citing numerous health and safety issues with reopening schools in person, and pushing for a county-wide remote start to the year until those concerns can be addressed.

Similar action is being taken at the state level. Last week, the leaders of the New Jersey Education Association, the New Jersey Association of School Administrators, and the New Jersey Association of Principals and Supervisors issued a [joint statement](#) calling on the Governor to order a state-wide remote start to the year based on similar health and safety concerns and the lack of time for districts to adequately address them. The New Jersey School Nurses Association has also issued a [statement](#) echoing these concerns.

In response, the Governor revised the original mandate for schools through an [Executive Order](#) that provides districts, like Mahwah, with the option to start the year remotely if they cannot meet the health and safety protocols. As a result, districts throughout the state and county have since [opted to start the year remotely](#).

We would like to return to school in person but not if doing so would jeopardize the health and safety of the students, families, and staff in Mahwah. Further complicating reopening is the fact that the transmission rate of COVID-19 is once again [on the rise in New Jersey](#), and the numbers are highest in Bergen County. And, according to the Mayor of Mahwah, there are [new confirmed cases every day in town](#).

Due to the stated issues with the district's reopening plan and the clear health and safety concerns associated with reopening schools in person during a pandemic, we are advocating for a remote start to the school year.

We did not reach this decision lightly, and we are not naive to the challenges posed by remote learning but there is nothing more important than health and safety. This is not hyperbolic nor is it a hypothetical concern; we have seen a rise in COVID-19 cases in [K-12 schools](#) and [colleges](#) around the country that have attempted an in-person reopening.

The district must take the time to ensure that schools are safe to reopen and, at the same time, expand on plans for a robust remote learning experience that integrates additional support for students and families that need it. The MEA has and will continue to offer input and work with the administration to achieve this goal.

Please join us in calling on the administration and Board of Education to begin the school year remotely and thoroughly address these health and safety concerns before reopening schools in person.

We care deeply about everyone who is part of the Mahwah school community and do not want to see our students, community members, administrators or our staff put at risk. Our lives and the lives of your children are too important. Let's get this right.

In unity,

The Mahwah Education Association