

July 18, 2020

Dear Lamoille North Families and Staff,

I hope all of you are enjoying this beautiful Vermont summer and are taking time for yourselves to enjoy all that our state has to offer. There is a tranquility here that is difficult to replicate anywhere else. For that, we are very fortunate. As mid-summer is upon us, I recognize that there is concern about schools and how the Vermont Agency of Education (VT AOE) directive to reopen schools will unfold. **On July 16<sup>th</sup>, we received long awaited guidance from the VT AOE that offers some flexibility in instructional models.** These can now include, under very specific circumstances, alternative modes of instruction, including a remote option if the system/school can manage it with its current resources, while not compromising instruction or programs. Please click on this link, [https://education.vermont.gov/sites/aoe/files/documents/edu-hybrid-learning-during-the-2020-2021-school-year\\_0.pdf](https://education.vermont.gov/sites/aoe/files/documents/edu-hybrid-learning-during-the-2020-2021-school-year_0.pdf), to read about options.

School leadership teams, Union Teacher and Support Staff leadership, and the District task force have been working all along to take family, student and staff survey data and incorporate what we could into the guidelines given to us in the initial Reopening Schools Guidance from the VT AOE. As you know, we sent a second survey to families asking for thoughts about staggered schedules, transportation, etc. You can find the broad survey results by clicking [HERE](#).

School teams, given the most recent guidance and survey results, are now planning schedules and the school day, aiming for in-person instruction in schools with appropriate safety protocols and structures in place. We are directed to place a strong emphasis on ensuring in-person instruction for students in elementary/primary grades.

**You can expect each building principal to communicate with families what the instructional day will resemble after they have had time to incorporate the most recent guidance. If you believe your student cannot participate for any in-person instruction, please contact your building principal as soon as possible to discuss possible options.**

We will do our best to accommodate your needs if we are able. I recognize that fall is not that far away and we are doing everything we can right now to make decisions and communicate them to you. Decisions made could evolve as we know more from our State officials.

If you have not read the initial guidelines for reopening from the VT AOE, I encourage you to do so. Please click on this link, <https://education.vermont.gov/sites/aoe/files/documents/edu-vdh-guidance-strong->

[healthy-start-school-health-rev-20200617.pdf](#), for the initial guidelines. A condensed version of the absolute “rules” in the guidance are as follows:

- Schools will open in-person in Step 2; bussing will be considered in Step 3.
- Spots where students traditionally congregate (eg. cafeteria, gym) cannot be used for their intended purposes.
- All students (unless there is medical documentation excusing the need for a mask) and adults are required to wear a mask. We're awaiting more guidance regarding PreK.
- We should, but are not required to, maintain a distance of 6 feet apart as much as possible. The American Association of Pediatrics suggests a distance of 3 to 6 feet.
- No outside visitors are allowed in our buildings, with certain exceptions. Contract service providers and scheduled meetings that may involve parents may be permitted.
- All students and adults must be health checked at the first point of contact - before riding the bus and before entering the school building. This includes a temperature check and answering COVID-related questions. Students who have been health checked cannot mingle with those who have not yet been health checked.
- All students, PreK-12, will stay with a specific cohort of classmates throughout the day. Middle and high school students are used to changing classes during any school day and this will no longer be the case. Instead, **all PreK-12 students will be assigned to pods/cohorts and will stay with their groups throughout the school day.** Daily routines and procedures will be different, but given how well our school communities responded to the sudden change in routine in March, I believe we will thrive with communication, dedication and grace.

Using the absolutes listed above, some decisions have been made. Our Facilities Director, Dylan LaFlam, along with all of our custodians, have walked through every classroom and office space in our district. All necessary protective equipment has been ordered including facial coverings, gloves, hand sanitizers, other disinfecting cleaning supplies, non-contact thermometers, and signage. Facial coverings **will** be provided for students as needed. As part of our upcoming community discussion in August, we will have our health staff available to discuss the reasoning around the need for facial coverings as well as screening protocols and procedures to follow in the event of illness. Our COVID Nurse Coordinator, Flo Kelley, has put routines in place for screening and will work with all staff and families to provide them with all health and safety related information.

As I mentioned in my last communication, we are looking to schedule a community forum in mid-August to address expectations and to answer any specific questions you might have. Schools will also be issuing information and communicating about routines, transportation options, expectations for students, families and the school community, so that we can all be on the same page with what school will look like in the fall. We also know that our staff needs more time to learn the considerable amount of new

procedures and protocols, and further refine more ways to teach online in case that becomes our reality again.

I recognize that there are many questions that do not yet have answers and we want things to be certain in a time where there is little certainty. These concerns are definitely heightened by social media posts around plans for reopening in other states and individuals expressing understandable concern for personal safety. Every state is governed by a different set of laws. Reopening guidelines in other states are not relevant to Lamoille North Supervisory Union (LNSU). And further still, how we reopen schools in LNSU might look different in a district like Burlington, whose student population is far greater and less easy to safely accommodate in all buildings.

This is not the case for LNSU. What drives the decision making is our current public health guidance and our geography. That being said, I recognize that we have never experienced something like this and appreciate that we, as responsible community members, are concerned. Our best decisions have to be driven by public health guidance, and we will need to continue to remain flexible in our responses to changing conditions.

I know that we will be able to work through any model of school day as long as we do it respectfully and continue to communicate. Decisions might need to be adjusted or amended at any time according to health modeling at the start of the school year and throughout the course of the year.

Thank you for reading through this letter and the documents referenced within. I will continue to communicate additions or changes and will work on setting a date for our community discussion in August. I know that you will have many questions. We will all do our best to answer them and will work hard to provide you with the comfort and confidence you need in our plans to best serve all families.

My very best to you,

Catherine Gallagher, M.Ed.  
Superintendent of Schools  
Lamoille North Supervisory Union