

February 18, 2021

Dear Simsbury Public Schools Staff and Families:

As you are aware from my previous communications Simsbury Public Schools has always valued in-person instruction. Our K-8 Simsbury families who chose to send students to school have certainly had some interruptions, but for the most part, they have experienced the benefits of in-person learning since last fall.

We always knew that high school was going to represent the greatest challenge for classroom instruction during COVID, but given the recent positive trends and current conditions in terms of virus activity, the time has come to move beyond the hybrid schedule and to increase the number of students who can attend Simsbury High School on a regular basis. With proper emphasis on our mitigation strategies and other school-specific strategies for managing the day, we are confident we can do this safely.

As you know, our high school families completed a survey last week to determine how many of our students might return if we offered in-person learning on the same 4-day-per-week schedule that we have been using successfully at the middle school since October. Approximately 67% of our families expressed interest in returning to school four days a week. Of the remainder, about 20% said they would remain in hybrid learning, and a smaller percentage would continue on the distance learning schedule.

Those survey results were shared with the professionals at the Farmington Valley Health District (FVHD), and they are supporting the return of Simsbury High School students to the classroom. In looking at most class sizes at SHS, this density of population will allow for proper social distancing in classrooms, and in the few cases where that is not possible, the SHS administration will use larger instructional spaces to move classes and maintain safe distancing. Obviously, masking at all times in classrooms will continue to be an important strategic priority.

Our plan is to "ramp up" to full in-person learning over the next few weeks. By enacting a staggered approach, the SHS administration hopes to observe and problem solve in real time with respect to larger classes and challenging times of day such as lunch, arrival/dismissal, passing time, etc. The schedule for full return will be as follows:

- 11th and 12 graders — In-person option begins Tuesday, March 2nd.
- 9th and 10th graders — In-person option begins Tuesday, March 9th.

We are able to make this plan right now due to a number of factors: case counts in Simsbury and the area continuing to decline; test positivity rates in CT that are well below the new CDC guidelines for opening schools; and, most importantly, months of evidence showing that our district has not experienced school-based transmissions or spread. In addition, we anticipate that the adults in our buildings will have the opportunity to be vaccinated in the coming weeks — a process that will help to lower risk of serious disease for our educators. And, while we may be experiencing a mostly dreary February week of weather right now, March and April will bring more opportunities for outdoor gatherings and open windows.

Of course, we will continue to monitor the data trends, including any impact the new variants may have on levels of contagion. If we have to adjust again, we will. However, it is our belief that we can work together to bring our high school students back safely and our hope that they will be with us in person for the remainder of this school year. Please expect a more detailed communication to come out directly to Simsbury High School Families from Principal Steve Patrino.

Thank you for your continued support.

Regards,  
Matt Curtis  
Superintendent of Schools