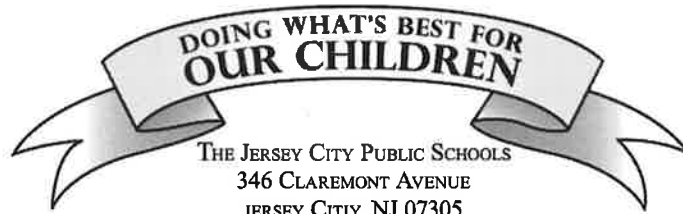




Mr. Franklin Walker
Superintendent of Schools



Email:
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To the Jersey City Community

April 20, 2021

Over the last 14 months since the onset of the pandemic in March 2020 and through the beginning of the school year 2020-2021, the Jersey City School Board and the District Administration have worked closely. We have worked cooperatively to support children's continuing education remotely while keeping the safety and security of our children, their families, our beloved educators, our non-instructional staff, and administration as a paramount priority.

My administration has responded in full measure to the demands of the pandemic through an extensive support system for the 30,000 children in Jersey City.

We set out to reopen and welcome our children back to schools after the 3rd marking period. The plan called for a limited hybrid education model which included 4 days of in-person learning through 12:30pm and the afternoon for teacher planning and student support. We embarked on a massive operation to ensure our facilities are ready, our staff are ready, and we aligned the resources we need to support the hybrid program. We have also surveyed parents' and teachers' and used the information to plan for the reopening of schools.

Based on the latest survey:

- Over 65% of the parents have confirmed that they will not send their children back to in-person learning. They were pleased with the learning momentum and did not want to disrupt the continuity. They did not want their children to change teachers.

- Only 60% of the teachers and staff responded that they would return to work in-person and on April 15th, 2021 teachers returned to their buildings to set-up for in-person teaching. Thursday recorded 438 absences and Friday 500. Accommodation requests went from 300 April 12th to 500 by April 15th.

The number of teachers with increased risk of COVID-19 able to currently work in-person does not meet the required number to support a hybrid program of in-person and remote learning. In some instances, we have classrooms with only two children coming in for in-person learning and that makes staffing logistically impossible. In collaboration with the J.C. Health Department, we offered vaccinations to all employees.

My administration is committed to always rely on science and data to help us with our decision-making. The risks are high in Hudson County since November from all accounts and including the CALI report (COVID-19 Activity Level Report). Some sources say that we are on the cusp or already in a middle surge. The average daily positives in New Jersey have been trending high, with 3,791 positive cases and 41 deaths. Last week the New York Times categorized Hudson County as extremely high risk for COVID-19 infection.

Most of our 30,000 children cannot be vaccinated as the vaccination for children less under the age of 16 is not yet ready. The safety of our children and staff is the utmost priority for us.

I cannot, in good faith, reopen the schools. I understand some parents are very disappointed. The risk of COVID-19 far outweighs the potential gains from 12 days of in-person, for students.

We want to focus our efforts and, most notably, our resources on a full in-person reopening in September this fall for the new school year 2021-2022. We will continue to work closely with the Board and the various unions and parent/community groups to plan a full robust reopening in September.

I want to thank the Board, our parents, our community leaders, and our beloved teachers and staff for their continued support and hard work in the interest of our children.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Franklin Walker". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above a horizontal line.

Mr. Franklin Walker, Superintendent of Schools