



Tenaflly Education Association

75 Tenaflly Road • Tenaflly, New Jersey 07670

August 25, 2020

Dear HSA Parents,

With staff due to report in one week and the official start of school in two weeks, the members of the Tenaflly Education Association wish to make the community aware of the realities of the current reopening plan.

In order for a district to be compliant with the state in regards to indoor air quality, the HVAC system only needs to be operational along with the ability for the dampers to be opened to capacity to allow fresh air circulation. However, the CDC guidelines recommend that an HVAC system used within a school be outfitted with air filters that have a MERV rating of at least 13, which is 85% effective in trapping Covid virus particles, according to ASHRAE, the American Society of Heating, Refrigerating and Air-Conditioning Engineers. When we inquired about Tenaflly's system, we were told that the filters ranged in MERV ratings from 6-11. Classroom ventilation units use filters with a MERV rating of 5-6 rating, which ASHRAE indicates is less than 20% effective in trapping Covid virus particles. In addition, the rooftop ventilation systems' ratings range from 8-11.

While filters with a MERV 13 rating are on order, they are on delay. Furthermore, there is a possibility that our HVAC system, due to its limitations, can't even handle using these filters since they can put a drain on the system causing it to possibly burn out. In addition, the air-conditioning project which will assist in keeping the buildings' temperatures and humidity levels in the normal range is delayed until the end of September. ASHRAE indicates buildings should be between 68 and 78 degrees with less than 60% humidity in order to prevent the spread of the virus. Considering September's typical weather patterns, these recommendations will likely be unattainable.

District staff began surveying the buildings within the last two weeks in terms of ventilation. They are still in the process of identifying areas of poor circulation and determining the functionality of windows. To date, they have found that there are areas with non-functional or broken windows that will need to be fixed. In addition, the majority of both staff and student restrooms do not have windows and are generally lacking in ventilation.

In terms of technology, teachers will be live streaming from classrooms with both the at-home cohort and the full virtual students using a Chromebook with a built-in webcam and microphone placed on desk or table and pointed at the teacher. Teachers will need to stand within a small area of the room in order for the students at home to see him or her. We do not know how much, if any, of the blackboard, whiteboard, or SmartBoard space the at-home students will be able to see. In addition, teachers will be wearing masks and face shields, and will not have microphones. The district has informed us that that they have ordered external webcams that have a wider field of view and better built-in microphones, however these items are back-ordered and will not be delivered until mid-October. Even with this additional

technology, the plan is still to simply mount these cameras to a Chromebook and continue to have the Chromebook stationed on a desk in the room and pointed at the teacher.

We have serious concerns about the ability of the system to handle simultaneous live streaming by all teachers across the district, in addition to the individual student Chromebooks for those participating in-person. In the past, the WiFi speed and connectivity has been spotty at best, and despite the district's claims of upgraded bandwidth, there currently is no contingency plan for a failure of this technology - which the entire hybrid learning plan hinges upon. We have asked the administration multiple times for guidance on how to handle a situation wherein the technology does not work, and we have yet to receive any guidance.

Parents who have chosen the all-virtual option for their students have been told that they will be working with a virtual teacher in addition to their classroom teacher. We have repeatedly asked for a clear description of the role and responsibility of the virtual teacher we have yet to receive any information. Earlier today it was then communicated to us that there are no full-time virtual teaching positions in the district.

At the high school, where students will be changing classes, the desks will be sprayed with an EPA-approved botanical disinfectant between classes. According to research conducted by the Provider Parents group of over 30 medical professionals within the community, the disinfectant kills the Covid virus particles with a 4 minute dwell time. This means that desks will need to be sprayed and let sit for 4 minutes before students can enter the classroom, leaving them to stand and wait in hallways.

Cohorts at the high school are based alphabetically, which in some cases means that classes are not well-balanced in terms of cohort size. There are classes where one cohort may have 17 students and the other cohort only has 4. Some rooms at the high school have been set up to accommodate these larger groups where the recommended social distancing cannot be achieved.

Please know that we want nothing more than to return to our buildings and do what we love. However, the realities of the current plan will not allow us to provide you with the top-notch education you expect and deserve while also keeping everyone safe and healthy.

Sincerely,

Jackie Wellman, T.E.A. President

Cristina Cutrone, T.E.A. Vice President

Jenn Halliwell, T.E.A. Negotiations Chairperson

April Celli, T.E.A. Professional Rights and Responsibilities Chairperson