

# MT. BLUE REGIONAL SCHOOL DISTRICT

CHESTERVILLE – FARMINGTON – INDUSTRY – NEW SHARON – NEW VINEYARD – STARKS – TEMPLE – VIENNA – WELD – WILTON  
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*“Public Schools not only serve the public, they make the public.”*

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TO: RSU 9 Parents & Guardians  
FROM: Christian M. Elkington, Superintendent  
RE: Beginning of our school year!  
DATE: 9-6-2021

Over the last several weeks, RSU 9 Staff, in their various roles, have put much time and effort toward the successful reopening of our schools, by either going through professional development, serving on reopening preparation committees or working to prepare our buildings. Our focus is to get students back in our schools and to deliver the best educational experience we possibly can. During the last week staff met in each school to review and finalize procedures, work on curriculum and complete added training, all in an effort to get ready for a beginning of school we had hoped would be less complicated. These efforts have been very determined, professional and focused. To say I have been impressed with the commitment, hard work and dedication I have seen, read and heard about would be an understatement. **I am very proud to associate myself with the staff and the work completed and in-progress within RSU 9!**

I say in-progress purposefully, because there will be difficulties and problems will arise that we cannot predict because much of what we will be encountering will be new. In each of my 36 years in education, regardless of my role, I have always wanted more time to get ready for the first day, week and month of school. There are always items I wanted to be better at and more prepared for. This year is no different. Even with moving our first day to tomorrow Tuesday, September 7<sup>th</sup> there are still equipment and supplies on back-order and plans to get in even better shape. As I have shared with staff what is most important is not that every bell and whistle works perfectly, every supply has been delivered or every procedure and plan is pulled off without a problem. **Right now, what is most important for our students, staff and you our parents is for school to start as safely as possible so our kids get back to the best place they can be - together in school again with each other and with our staff!**

Student Attendance is critical for learning, as we all know. As mentioned previously, our school board voted to go with a Universal Masking expectation to start the school year. This means that all students and staff must wear a facemask when inside any of our school buses or buildings. It will be most important that you our parents and guardians impress upon your son or daughter that they need to follow this expectation. I am told that Mt. Blue Students did a great job last year following these expectations. We will of course expect the same at the start of this year. During a health emergency such as we are in, students who refuse to wear a proper face mask, correctly will be sent home, considered absent unexcused and truant. We will follow our truancy expectations as explained in policy. Our masking requirement will be revisited monthly as the board reviews conditions and US and ME CDC guidance.

Even with masking and spacing requirements, this likely is going to be a difficult year as we adjust to another new normal with a differing, more contagious variant, and with the prospect of others possibly emerging. When I say difficult I mean really hard and trying as we maintain our focus of having school in-person every day while working through quarantining concerns that come if there are positive cases in our schools. All of our preparations (masking, spacing etc.) are aimed at reducing the need for quarantining, but I cannot guarantee that we can eliminate the need for it.

I ask for your patience and understanding as we work through the difficulties that will come our first day, our first week and our first month. No matter if it is with transportation, technology, transportation drop off & pick up, school meals or every other adjustment and change that we need to make during the time of COVID 19, we will learn from the difficulties we experience and improve our practices. Before the US Navy puts a ship into service they give it a “shakedown” cruise, which lasts many, many weeks. Our district’s “shakedown” cruise begins when school starts tomorrow. We plan for our preparations to work well the first time, but also understand that some will not and **our “shakedown” cruise will continue as we will adjust as needed to get where our kids need to be.**

Our staff face a unique set of challenges as they adjust not only the way they work, but their “craft”. Teaching is a ‘craft’ that is learned over years of study, effort and through some trial and error. Teachers are not good because of the equipment used, a book read or a special lesson taught, but they are good because of the efforts they make to get to know, support and help their/our students learn. Under our current circumstances, many of our staff will need to continue to change some of their “craft”, the “best practices” they have used to meet students’ needs. They must do this in order to fit into the square instructional peg we have in this time of COVID. **This will be hard and will need everyone’s understanding as we go through some trial and error at times this year.**

In facing the upcoming challenges described above, I need to let you know that our staff and I are very concerned that some of you, our parents and guardians, along with people in our communities will be quick to complain and place blame using Facebook, Twitter etc. when things don’t go well. Make no mistake, we and I need to be told directly about concerns or problems so they can be fixed. At the same time, it is essential that every parent and community member control the furor and negative emotions that have been exhibited in other districts this summer and that sometimes flair when we in our schools make a mistakes or that is generated by negative comments, criticisms and rumors shared online. *The bottom line is, our staff is looking forward to working with your kids!* We will do our best and keep improving based on lessons-learned. Your understanding and **direct** communication of concerns will help us use our energies to find solutions instead of wasting energy worrying about negative feedback being generated in the community. **Thanking each one of you in advance for your understanding, support and assistance!**

As mentioned not everything we ordered or had planned to have up and running is ready to go, because delays in the supply lines caused by the pandemic in the US and around the world. **Flexibility has been and will remain our middle name in 2021-2022 as we rise to the challenges that come our way.** I am pleased to say that even with all the difficulties we have encountered, we are in the best position we can be to start the 2021-2022 School Year. By working together we will reduce risks, get our kids and staff back together in school and make the 2021-2022 school year the best that it can and WILL be!

**Thanks to everyone who has and is making our beginning the best possible!**

Thanks also for taking time to read the above!