



HIGHLAND FALLS-FORT MONTGOMERY CENTRAL SCHOOL DISTRICT

Mr. Michael McElduff, Superintendent of Schools

The District has determined the temporary closure of Fort Montgomery Elementary School for the 2024-2025 school year is necessary to ensure the Capital Project stays on schedule. Delays in the New York State Department of Education project review process have led to this decision. Despite submitting our project for review in late October of 2023, approval has not yet been granted as of May 30, 2024, causing the review time to exceed over 28 weeks. As mentioned in the Superintendent's letter to the community on May 30, 2024, this course of action is needed to meet project deadlines and exercise financial prudence.

Please find below additional information for families and community members to assist with the transition process.

General Questions and Answers:

- **Why can't we begin the FMES Capital Project during the fall of 2024?**
 - The district's architecture and construction management team has determined that relocating the building occupants is necessary due to the extensive staging, rock removal, and use of large machinery required for the project. Originally scheduled to commence on July 1, 2024, the project start date has now been delayed to mid-late August due to delays with the SED approval process. The district prioritizes the health and safety of its faculty, staff, and students and recognizes that conducting this work while the building is occupied poses safety concerns.
- **Why can't they conduct staging, rock removal etc. after school hours? This would seem like a better solution than closing the school for an entire year.**
 - After careful consideration, it was determined that due to the time constraints imposed by the initial 8 weeks of the project and potential disruptions to the community caused by daily staging and loud rock removal activities, it would not be feasible to complete the project outside of regular working hours. Safety concerns also played a significant role in the decision not to proceed with the initial phase of the FMES Capital Project.
- **If the Fort Montgomery Elementary School is closing, where are the students in Pre-K through 2nd grade going?**
 - The Highland Falls Intermediate School will house students from Pre-K through 6th grade for the 2024-2025 school year.
- **Where are students in 7th and 8th grade going next year?**

- Students in the 7th and 8th grades will be transitioning to James I. O’Neill High School for the upcoming 2024-2025 academic year. This decision follows a previous practice of relocating these grade levels to the high school during renovation projects.
- **How do I know if my students qualify for bussing transportation?**
 - Students who attend James I. O’Neill will be provided bussing, which is the current practice. Students in grades K-6 attending HFIS next academic year will adhere to the established transportation guidelines. To be eligible for bussing, students must reside beyond .7 miles from the school. If a student's residence is within .7 miles, transportation to and from school must be arranged by a parent, guardian, older sibling, etc. Bussing will continue to be available for Pre-K students regardless of their proximity to the school.
- **I can see parking to be a major problem at both HFIS and JIO next year. How does the district plan to handle the added faculty, staff and visitors throughout the school year?**
 - The district will begin improvements to the Highland Falls Elementary School parking lot, including the addition of 10-15 parking spots. This expansion should accommodate the needs of faculty, staff, and visitors. JIO is also planning to add 6-8 parking spots, but recognizes this may not be enough for additional faculty and staff. As a result, the possibility of implementing a lottery system for senior parking next year is being considered. Further information will be communicated to families throughout the summer regarding this matter.
- **When should I expect my child’s schedule for the 24-25 school year?**
 - As a result of the district's decision to implement significant changes, the building administrators and their Master Schedule Committees will need some time to prepare schedules. The committees will commence working on the intricate schedules during the first week of June. Administration will communicate updates regarding the release of schedules.
- **Why did the district wait so long to inform the community? I feel like they could have done a better job of making us all aware there was a concern with the Capital Project?**
 - The district has engaged in discussions over the past 2-3 months regarding the timeline for the SED project during the Board of Education meetings. Furthermore, the district's architect and construction management team provided a comprehensive presentation during the April 18th Board of Education meeting regarding the challenges in commencing the FMES Capital Project on schedule. They highlighted to both the Board of Education and the community that they were exploring alternative strategies to ensure timely completion of the FMES project. Unfortunately, due to the damages incurred at the HFIS gymnasium, the district had to reassess its priorities and develop a plan to address this issue. The

district received an update during the week of May 20th that repairs to the HFIS gymnasium could be completed before the start of the 2024-2025 school year. This allowed the district to finalize the temporary closure of FMES and pivot in a new direction.

- **Will the CONNECT program be offered to all students at HFIS? Will Healthy Kids be offered to our younger students?**
 - The District has informed the CONNECT program of the upcoming changes and they are working on how they will proceed for the 2024-2025 school year. The same contact has been made to Healthy Kids and they will discuss their plan in the coming weeks.
- **Why can't we permanently shutdown FMES, this would save a lot of money?**
 - This is a temporary measure to address the needs of FMES and complete the full renovation in a timely and cost effective fashion. The current facilities at FMES lack dedicated spaces for Art, Music, and STREAM programs, as well as a suitable Library space for students. For the 24-25 school year, HFIS students will have Art and Music classes in their classrooms, due to the spaces needed for the incoming Pre-k through 2nd grade classrooms. Temporary walls will be erected to accommodate the increased number of students, faculty, and staff transitioning from FMES as well. While this is not an ideal situation for our district, vacating FMES to complete the project will provide our faculty, staff, and students with the quality educational spaces they deserve for the 2025-2026 school year.

HFIS and FMES Specific Questions and Answers:

- **What time will school be starting for HFIS next year?**
 - Students in grades Kindergarten through 6th grade will commence school at 8:00 am and will conclude at 3:00 pm. Pre-K students will attend from 8:30 am to 2:30 pm. As we move through the summer, the school administration will provide further information on arrival and dismissal procedures.
- **The HFIS playground has equipment that is not suitable for students in Pre-K through 1st grade. What does the district plan to do to make sure my child has access to safe age appropriate equipment?**
 - The district is currently in the process of developing recreational areas for our younger students, which will feature amenities such as water tables, sandboxes, chalkboards, age-appropriate slides, and more. Additionally, HFIS offers a spacious soccer field and ample space for students to engage in physical activity while prioritizing safety. Our youngest students will not be allowed to engage in activities on the large jungle gym structure at HFIS.
- **Is FMES simply becoming HFIS or are the buildings going to be separated?**

- FMES and HFIS will maintain distinct identities, including separate phone lines for secretarial and nursing staff. Each school will have a dedicated building principal responsible for day-to-day operations. If there is interest in merging for events such as celebrations or spirit week, decisions will be made collaboratively by the administrative team and faculty/staff from both schools.
- **I am concerned that the younger students in grades Pre-K through 2nd will have interactions with 5th and 6th graders. How does the district intend to keep the students separate?**
 - It is common for schools in the state of New York to have a Pre-Kindergarten through 6th-grade building. Many neighboring districts also have a similar grade configuration. Students will be divided into appropriate groups as much as possible for events such as Assemblies, Field Day and building-wide activities. While there may be occasions where all students come together for certain assemblies, this will be determined by the administrative team with the input and collaboration from the faculty and staff.
- **How is HFIS going to fit Pre-K through 6th grade in the building?**
 - The school district is dedicated to providing a comprehensive educational experience for our students, encompassing academic, social, and emotional growth. Pre-K and Kindergarten students will be located on the lower level at HFIS, with their own dedicated bathrooms. Students in grades 1-3 will be situated on the second floor, previously used by the middle school wing. Grades 4-5 will also be on the second floor, in the Library wing. 6th grade will be relocated to the first floor. Music and Art classes will use the push-in model, similar to the approach at Fort Montgomery School for the past five years. Band and Chorus will take place in the Auditorium, while STREAM and Library activities will be situated in the Library. The gymnasium can be partitioned to accommodate activities suitable for different age groups.
- **What does lunch/recess look like at HFIS next year?**
 - In the upcoming school year, the goal is to have Pre-Kindergarten students have lunch in their classrooms. Currently, Kindergarten through 6th-grade students will have specific designated times for lunch and will eat with their respective grade levels, while also enjoying recess together. Additional details and information will be provided by the building administration team as the summer progresses.

JIO Specific Questions and Answers:

- **What time will 7th and 8th grade students start school this fall?**
 - Students in grades 7-12 will follow a unified schedule from 7:20 am to 2:24 pm. It is important to note that students in grades 7 and 8 must attend school for the full duration, while students in grades 9-12 have the option to either attend extended

day at 1:50 pm or leave the building. Further details will be provided by the High School Administration team as summer unfolds.

- **I don't feel comfortable with my 7th grade student being in the same building as a 12th grader. How is the district ensuring that my child has ZERO interaction with older students?**
 - The district acknowledges that complete separation between 7th and 8th grade students and older students at JIO cannot be guaranteed. However, proactive measures are being implemented by the district and high school administrators to minimize interactions between lower and upperclassmen. Specifically, designated classrooms will be assigned exclusively for 7th and 8th grade for the majority of their classes. If there is a need for these students to move to different floors, the transition will begin after the 2nd bell to ensure that most students in grades 9-12 are already in classrooms, reducing potential interactions in the halls. Additionally, students in 7th and 8th grade will have a 2-minute transition time between classes.
- **Will 7th and 8th grade students be dining alongside the upperclassmen during lunch?**
 - No, students in 7th and 8th grade will have lunch during the same time period but will be separate from the upperclassmen.
- **Will 7th and 8th graders continue to have recess?**
 - All students at JIO will have a designated 30-minute lunch period. Students in 7th and 8th grade are expected to remain in the cafeteria during this time, unless they require a restroom break or are accompanied by a faculty or staff member. Recess will not be offered to students of JIO.
- **Who will be in charge of the 7th and 8th grade students in the event a parent needs to contact an administrator?**
 - The Assistant Principal from HFIS will be relocating to James I. O'Neill High School to oversee the 7th and 8th grade students. They will serve as the primary contact for families. In addition, a school counselor from HFIS will also transition to the high school to specifically support the 7th and 8th graders. The High School Principal holds overall responsibility for all students in grades 7-12.
- **In High School, grade levels are combined for specials, specifically P.E., Chorus, Art, and Band. Are 7th and 8th graders going to be combined with the upperclassmen?**
 - In regards to scheduling, 7th and 8th grade classes will have dedicated physical education time separate from the rest of the school. Furthermore, the Band and Chorus instructor from HFIS will be providing instruction for the 7th and 8th grade music program. Students enrolled in art classes in 7th or 8th grade will also have a designated teacher for those subjects.

- **By adding 7th and 8th grade to James I. O’Neill, how will this impact my high school child, academically (grades 9-12)?**
 - The primary change for JIO students will be the enrollment of an additional 100+ students. Programming for high school students will remain consistent, with a continuation of the current robust course offerings and support from existing faculty and staff. To maintain continuity for all students, including those in 7th and 8th grade, the district will transition all faculty and staff from those grade levels to JIO.
- **Can a 7th or 8th grader participate in extracurricular activities at the High School, such as sports, and clubs?**
 - Regarding sports, students in 7th and 8th grade are eligible to participate in high school level competitions, provided they pass tryouts and adhere to specific guidelines. For more information, please contact Mr. Wilson, our Athletic Director at bryan.wilson@hffmcsd.org. However, students in 7th and 8th grade are **not permitted to join 9-12 clubs**. They will have access to the same clubs offered at HFIS in years past. For information on non-sports related clubs and extracurricular activities, please contact your child's school counselor or building administrator.