

June 26, 2020

Dear Parents and Guardians:

As the school year has ended and we head into July, I'm sure many of you are wondering what school will be like come August. I appreciate your response as many of you chose to participate in our return to school survey that was sent out last week. We received 2,900 survey responses. At this time, over 85% of you indicated that you would send your children back to school with minimal mitigation strategies. We plan on sending out the survey again in July and early August in order to establish a trend. The trend that we conclude from the surveys will ensure that we design our final return-to-school plan in a manner that is not only responsible, but also considers the level of comfort our parents have in returning. It will be critical that we have just as much participation in the remaining two surveys in order to validate our findings. In addition to our surveys, we are in constant conversation with the Allegheny Health Department, local officials, and state officials to stay current on the developments across the state and to help guide our decisions when developing our re-entry plan to ensure that we are being responsible and use practices that are sound and sensible. This process has been difficult to navigate as the guidelines and restrictions for reopening schools are fluid, evolving slowly and vague. From the guidance we've been given, many of the decisions will rest at the district level.

It is our full intent to return to school in the fall with some mitigation efforts in place, while providing some sense of normalcy to our students, staff, and families. We realize that extra mitigation efforts and adaptations may need to be made for some at-risk or medically vulnerable students in order to increase their protection for in-person instruction. That said, we will most definitely still have our full-time cyber option available to those families who may not be ready to come back in person or want to wait for a vaccine. Our full-time cyber program has existed for over a year now, and it was developed for students who prefer an online environment. It is a robust, self-paced program that is able to serve as a long term answer (semester or more) for students.

We are working with a number of other local districts to work out the details of a plan that will ensure most of us are approaching the start of the school year in a similar manner that includes students being in school full-time. While some districts are releasing their plans early, we believe we need to collect more data and continue dialogue with our parents and local and state health officials in order to make a sound decision that meets everyone's needs. There is so much that could happen between now and August 24. To put out a plan with great detail would be premature. Please know that we recognize our students and families have different needs and challenges and we are doing our best to consider all of them.

The School Board approved a return-to-athletics and activities plan at last night's board meeting. This plan is devised to get us through summer training and practice and will surely be revised before school starts. Once approved, the plan will be posted online and parents will need to sign a waiver prior to their children returning to sports and activities. You will be receiving communication from your coaches at the beginning of next week.

At this time, we are still making plans for a senior prom on Thursday, July 16 and a formal graduation in the stadium on July 18. Our goal is to make both experiences as normal as possible while providing a safe environment. Families at the graduation will be able to bring four family members. Tickets have already been distributed. The eighth grade dance is also still on for August 3rd, and as we draw closer to that date, we will communicate what mitigation efforts will have to take place in order to make it as safe as possible. We are also planning some sort of in-person transition activities that will occur later in the summer for grades K, 3, 5, and 9. As these events draw nearer, we will be sure to communicate the mitigation strategies that will be in place at that time.

Finally, the one event that was originally scheduled back in early May, that we now need to cancel, is the high school musical. While we had the best of intentions and desire for the show to go on, the planning and reality of doing it in late July or early August have become less feasible. With the flying and difficulty involved in performing Peter Pan, there just wasn't enough time to be able to practice and put on a safe production. After many conversations between the key adults involved with the production, it was determined that due to the time restrictions and safety challenges, the production will not be possible. Mrs. Barker and the rest of the staff would like to tape/livestream a small production entitled "Senior Bows" on July 14th to honor our graduating seniors. Mrs. Barker will be following up with more details.

In summary, I know these last few months have been very difficult for everyone. We will continue to keep you informed, continue to be deliberate with our communications, and not be overly premature in our decision making. Unfortunately, we are being asked to plan for something that is two months away when our own county health officials said they are unable to predict anything beyond two weeks at a time. I can assure you that we will be prepared and develop a plan that meets every child's needs and addresses the concerns and challenges that face our families. What we can't predict are directives and restrictions from the Governor's Office or Pennsylvania Department of Education. That said, I will be sure to keep everyone informed in a timely manner along the way. As always, please feel free to email or call me if you have any questions. In order to navigate the challenges ahead, we will need to work together and keep the lines of communication open and ongoing.

Sincerely,



Dr. Michael Ghilani
Superintendent

