

Reynolds School District

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Superintendent of Schools

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July 22, 2020

Re: 2020-2021 School Reopening

Dear Reynolds Family,

I hope this letter finds you in good health. I write with an update on our efforts to reopen Reynolds School District for the 2020-2021 school year.

Despite our best efforts, the COVID-19 pandemic continues to impact our community. Mandates requiring masks and social distancing prevent the normal return to school that we all hope for. Yet Reynolds remains dedicated to providing our students with a rich learning experience and a safe environment.

The virus has put these two objectives at odds. The abrupt shutdown in the spring prioritized safety at the cost of education. Equally, starting school as if there was no pandemic would unnecessarily endanger our children and staff. Accordingly, our reopening plan aims to strike an appropriate balance between safety and learning.

Frequent changes in guidance from the Department of Education, Department of Health, and the Governor have made it difficult to achieve a stable balance. While evidence suggests that practices such as physical distancing, masking, ventilation, cleaning, and hygiene have the potential to mitigate the spread of COVID-19, the Governor has indicated a willingness to “pull the plug” on reopening schools if the current trends do not improve. Under the current guidance, a single COVID-19 case at Reynolds could result in a multiple week shutdown. We must prepare for that possibility now.

We need a return plan that will allow the District to be resilient in the face of potential disruptions. We must prepare for the worst by empowering our staff and students to participate in quality teacher-led instruction at home in the event of a forced shutdown.

To that end, Reynolds will begin the 2020-2021 school year via Live Online Learning. Under this model, teachers and students will interact through real-time instruction five days a week on a District provided device. The District has secured iPads for every K-1 student and Chromebooks for every 2-12 student. We are also working to increase Internet access to students and educators who lack it at home. With a focus on a single model, we can better concentrate our resources and work with educators and students to be successful with virtual learning for all students.

Rest assured, our goal is to resume in-person instruction as soon as practicable. When that happens our experience with this temporary online model will have armed us with the skillset to pivot back to in-home instruction if required.

Currently, there is no escaping virtual instruction. As long as the face-covering and social distancing order remains in effect, Reynolds is unable to return to full-time in-person instruction for all students. The District lacks the physical space and workforce to allow mask removal for learning and essential activities like eating. As a result, when we return to in-person instruction the District will likely implement a hybrid model whereby students still receive a portion of their education at home.

The most prudent course of action now is to focus on how we can provide the highest possible quality of virtual learning during the first nine weeks of the school year. During this time, we hope that the virus is mitigated to a level that will allow for an expansion of in-person learning. The Board of Directors and Pandemic Team will continue to collaborate to determine if/when the District can shift to a hybrid model.

This is far from what we had hoped to provide. Anything that departs from a traditional in-person full return results in substantial disruption to our homes and school. Given the world's current instability, I hope our plan will provide some sense of comfort, even if you disagree with it. Our focus on live virtual instruction will allow us to consistently deliver education no matter what changes come out of Mercer County, Harrisburg, or Washington D.C. for the next nine weeks.

The most up to date Health and Safety Plan will be available on the District's website. I encourage you to review it for more information. We will continue to provide updates as our first day of school approaches.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "John Sibeto".

John Sibeto
Superintendent of Schools