

August 31, 2020

Dear Parents, Guardians, Students and Staff,

I hope that you and your families are well. I want to thank the many staff, students and parents for your hard work, encouraging words and patience as we begin this school year in full remote-learning mode. I have several points of interest I want to share with you. I have also included responses to a set of questions I recently received from a group of parents. The .pdf link is below.

The transition week of August 17-24 was valuable and effective. We were able to do the following:

- Spend more time planning and preparing
- Provide an in-person 6th grade orientation in small groups with parents and students
- Provide in-person assessments for particular groups of students
- Begin providing in-person services to particular students with special needs (this will continue throughout the year)
- Conduct in-person, one-on-one meetings with elementary students and their parents
- Maintain some in-person career tech and vocational learning, depending on location

The week of August 24-28 began full remote learning in earnest and went well. I have received dozens of compliments about our staff going the extra mile and being well prepared. We understand that more improvements can be made and we will continue to reflect, learn and adjust. Our All-Access Learning Model as applied to remote learning is grounded in the following priorities:

- Finding ways to build one-on-one relationships with students. We believe this to be critical to emotional well-being.
 1. Home visits by teacher teams
 2. Small group and individual virtual meetings
 3. Phone calls to struggling students
 4. Wellness checks
 5. Counseling services
 6. One-on-one, in-person meetings
 7. Timely academic support and feedback
 8. Participation in allowed activities
- Establishing remote learning routines
 1. Goals and personalized learning plans
 2. Mastering learning tools and using resources to achieve goals
 3. Providing remote learning tips and guidance to parents and students
- Assessment
 1. Assessing student learning in order to inform instruction

2. Student demonstration of what has been learned
- Habits of Mind
 1. Characteristics for success
 2. Critical thinking
 3. Application
 4. Communicating what has been learned for what purpose
 5. Creativity, imagination and innovation
 6. Ownership of learning
 - Professional Development
 1. Understanding what we do well in a remote-learning environment
 2. Getting better at what we do
 3. Inventing and adapting for relevancy

Every day, our staff thinks and acts on these priorities. We are not perfect, but we keep striving to make this situation the best it can be.

The COVID-19 trend data in our county is headed in the right direction. The Cuyahoga County Board of Health has yet to recommend a return to school, and suggests that we must see “several” weeks of the current trend to know that the trend is sustainable. I have asked for a clarification on the meaning of the term “several weeks,” but have yet to receive one.

When the time comes, we have two back-to-school plans. The first is a three-week phase to in-person learning by grade level with a remote option. The second is a one-week pivot to in-person learning with a remote option. The county and local trend data, as well as timing will determine which plan is enacted. I am hopeful that we can return to school before the 9-week period is up.

While our county data is encouraging, our community COVID-19 data is of great concern to me. As I write this letter, we have 15 students who have tested positive and most are showing symptoms. We are awaiting the results of several more students. I have also quarantined several staff out of caution. Adding to my concern are the rumors I receive from adults via social media screenshots and emails indicating that many more students (athletes and non-athletes) are infected, but are not saying anything. Please know that while concerning, I do not make decisions based on rumors.

With every known case, we consult our Cuyahoga County Board of Health and receive direction and guidance. We have provided the CCBH with dozens of data points so they can conduct the required contact tracing. It is alleged by many that all cases involving sports are a result of a mass gathering in our community that demonstrated no regard for social distancing, masks or any other health and safety protocols. These cases have resulted in my decisions to suspend volleyball, football and women’s soccer. These teams must suspend play for 14 days, following the last day of contact, per the OHSAA and the CCBH. Cross country, tennis, golf, band, flags, Cattettes and men’s soccer continue to practice and compete.

Returning to competition will be possible, but will be dependent on the willingness to adhere to safety and health protocols.

Volleyball is scheduled to return on September 5.

Women's soccer is scheduled to return on September 5.

Football is scheduled to return on September 6.

Students who have tested positive must have a clearance from a physician before returning. Students who test positive after the initial contact date cannot participate for 10 days from the date of the positive test. The athletic director has provided specifics to students and their families.

The confirmed spread of COVID-19 among our students has given me reason for pause on our back-to-school plans. I care deeply for our students and staff and will not put them at risk until I better understand the spread in our community. So for now, the current plan stands. Once we do return to in-person learning it will be critically important that we all adhere to the protocols while we are in school and out in the community. If not, we risk being in the situation we are in now.

Finally, there is a large group of parents purporting, via social media that we are in full-remote learning because it is the easiest path and saves money. This is not only a false narrative, but absurd. The depth and breadth of our planning has been highly complex and quite challenging for our entire staff. There is nothing easy about teaching remotely, adjusting technologies, preparing our facilities, assessing learning, providing and enforcing PPE, supporting students and families, reworking budgets, managing the politics, addressing human resource needs, preparing venues for events, etc. We all want kids back in school. It is what we know and what we do. Please read the Q & A below for more information.

[August 31 2020 Q-A.pdf](#)

As mentioned, there have been many positive stories about our staff and students going the extra mile. Here are but a few that demonstrates our commitment to do the best we can.

"First-- thank you for a great first week. I have been in and out of the room with my own PD for back to school -- but I was so impressed with the social-emotional learning taking place that I occasionally jotted down notes of ideas to "steal" as your lessons were awesome. I wanted to say how much I (as well as my husband) appreciate your efforts." ~ Erin S.

"I just want to let you know that I am very impressed with the Warrior team as a whole. You can tell that they have planned and prepared for remote learning in a very well thought out manner. It appears this teams' intent is to maximize the entire remote learning day, with plenty of touch points and actual face time (via zoom) with the kids. The way they are leveraging and communicating on the technology in a consistent

manner for the children and adults is refreshing. I don't feel over or under communicated to. Cheers to a great year for all the staff and children!" ~ Allison T.

"Wanted to give you some feedback on the first day of third grade. My son had an amazing first day. I think your class was very well organized and I was very impressed to see how much he navigated on his own for the first day. The daily schedule was great to know what to expect and I was super happy to see how much he was learning already on the first day of school. I love the break out of smaller group sessions to keep him more engaged." ~Laura V.

"I wanted to write you a note saying what an excellent job my son's school, Gates Mills Elementary, has done with this unprecedented start of the school year. A week before classes started they had one-on-one meetings and were happy to accommodate our request for an outside meeting. My son's teacher took the initiative to reach out and collaborate with the district's other first grade teachers to create and share high quality online content. Whenever we have any questions, they are responded to quickly and thoughtfully. All of this was made possible because you and the district made the challenging but responsible decision to go remote early. Thank you." ~ Erica A.

Sincerely,
Keith Kelly, Superintendent