

May 4, 2020

Dear West Chester Area School District Community,

With just five weeks left in the school year, I wanted to take a moment to address the question of what school might look like as we open the 2020-21 school year. Simply put, at this time, we don't have definitive answers. We can, however, tell you that we are working every day, around the clock, to be as prepared as possible for a variety of scenarios and situations.

As an educator and parent, I understand there is a great deal of uncertainty and anxiety about the new school year that is now just four months away. I very much want my own children to return to our schools – just the way it's always been. But will we be able to do that? While our teachers have done an incredible job flipping our entire instructional model online in a matter of days in the middle of a pandemic, we all want a return to normalcy.

I have concerns about the efficacy and practicality of some of the procedures reportedly tried in other countries and being suggested as possibilities for U.S. schools. Among these: children wearing face masks, students attending in-person school every other day (or in some kind of staggered manner) so that class sizes can be cut dramatically to provide space for social distancing, constant sanitizing, and taking student temperatures to ensure no one who is sick is allowed to enter the schools. Nevertheless, we are analyzing these kinds of procedures – and more – to be sure we are as prepared as possible. We will work tirelessly to ensure our schools are as safe as we can make them *whenever* and *however* we reopen in person.

We are also preparing for the possibility that we have to be online again in the 2020-21 school year. While it's not what any of us want, we must be prepared for this possibility. Health experts agree that it's likely schools will face some kind of intermittent closures in the coming school year. We will continue to gather student, parent, and teacher feedback and data about our current distance learning. We're working with our teachers and administrators to continue to improve and to deliver a more fully developed program that may have to replace in-person instruction during the next school year.

The West Chester Area School District is a strong, dynamic, high-achieving school district comprised of talented and passionate staff members who care deeply for our students. We will be there for them – no matter what.

Each week I'm in regular contact with state and local officials who will ultimately make the decisions about how our schools are permitted to operate. I'm communicating with numerous statewide educational advocacy groups that are working to ensure public school educators have a strong voice in the discussion. I also speak several times a week with the superintendents of numerous other local school districts, as we all grapple with the question of how to provide the best and safest education to our students in unprecedented times.

As I write this note, we're beginning national Teacher Appreciation Week and School Nurse Appreciation Week. Please join me in reaching out to the teachers, school nurses, and other educators in our children's lives to thank them for all they have done and continue to do – to teach, care, nurture, support, and to model resilience and optimism. They are so important in the lives of our students.

We'll continue to communicate with you as our plans for the fall evolve. The West Chester Area School District is strong. We'll face this challenge with continued high standards along with grace and compassion for our students and staff, and we will emerge even stronger.

Thank you for your continued support.

Dr. Jim Scanlon, Superintendent