

November 20, 2020

Dear WCASD Community,

After a great deal of thought and deliberation, I'm writing to let you know that the West Chester Area School District will **move to fully virtual instruction for all students from Monday, November 30 through Friday, December 11. We anticipate returning to Hybrid Learning on Monday December 14.** We will also suspend sports and all afterschool activities during this time. Our administration and School Board have carefully deliberated this very difficult decision. We have kept health and safety, as well as our ability to operate, at the forefront of our decision making. The following are our major decision points:

- COVID positivity rates have climbed across our region and nationally. Today, the Chester County Health Department (CCHD) released the weekly positivity rate, at 196 per 100,000. Per our health and safety plan, we follow guidance from CCHD as well as our internal COVID metrics. Their plan calls for schools to consider a phase out to virtual instruction after positivity rates remain above 80 for three weeks in a row. Numerous health officials have said modeling shows this number will likely increase, rather than decrease, over the Thanksgiving holiday.
- We have followed our health and safety plan protocols as COVID cases and exposures have arisen for students and staff. In a school district of more than 12,000 students and 1,500 staff, this has meant our team has spent a tremendous amount of time on contact tracing, 7 days a week. As of November 20, 185 staff members are quarantined due to possible exposure to a person testing positive either in school or the community. Our region and nation are facing a national shortage of substitutes, and we are struggling to provide adequate coverage for all of our classes, even when we have deployed many of our district office administrators and other staff members to cover classes. (We will be sending information soon about how parents can qualify to substitute teach - even for a few days - in our schools.)
- This week, Pennsylvania issued a [travel quarantine](#) effective November 20: Anyone traveling out of state is required to present a negative COVID test result before returning to school/work, or quarantine for 14 days upon return (This does not apply to people who commute across state lines for work). This is incredibly difficult to monitor. We simply cannot control what our families and staff do over the holiday. Two weeks from the traditional Thanksgiving return travel day (the Sunday after Thanksgiving) takes us through Friday, December 11.

I want to share a few points that I feel are extremely important:

- None of this is easy, obvious, or simple. While I receive emails every day imploring me to "do the right thing," everyone's version of what is 'right' is very different. Guidance changes like the wind. National organizations say one thing one day and reverse course

the next. At the beginning of this week, the state government told superintendents to get ready to close, and by the end of the week, they tweeted about the importance of in-person instruction. Each day someone emails me a new study or report that is contradictory to the one that came before it. We have directional whiplash and are doing our very best to make informed decisions.

- Our staff and students have done an *incredible* job in extremely challenging circumstances. We know they are struggling. The entire nation is struggling with a myriad of very challenging, pandemic-related issues. Thank you to all of our families who are doing their best to support every member of this school district. We are a strong community, and we must try to come together.
- We fully understand the importance and benefits of in-person instruction, and our goal is to remain in-person, with mitigation efforts in place, as much as possible. We will continue to communicate as we move throughout this challenging school year.
- If at any time we are in person, and you want your child to learn remotely, please simply notify your child's principal (secondary students) or teacher (elementary students.) We feel it's important to provide flexibility for our families.

I hope you are able to enjoy a very safe and happy Thanksgiving. Even amidst a national crisis, we have many things for which to be thankful.

Sincerely and gratefully,

Dr. Jim Scanlon, Superintendent