



April 22, 2020

Dear Washington Township School Community,

I hope this letter finds you, your family, and loved ones safe and healthy. I wanted to take the time to touch on a couple of items related to the Governor's comments last week and to update you on some aspects of our remote learning that we are adjusting.

Last week, Governor Murphy extended the stay-at-home order to May 15th. This led many folks to think that schools may be reopened shortly thereafter. Please know that the Governor's order regarding school closings is indefinite. There is no end date at this time. Only the Governor can lift the order allowing school districts the autonomy of deciding if and how they will reopen. Clearly, there are many things to consider in this case, and given that the last day of school is Thursday, June 18th, the prospects of school reopening becomes more unlikely with each passing day. However, our administration continues to work on plans to ensure the health and safety of our staff and students should a return to school be possible.

On Monday, the Governor indicated that he would shortly unveil a more detailed "blueprint" of the gradual reopening of the state. We are most interested in hearing that plan. My hope is that it will give us a clear picture of what the remainder of this school year may look like.

In the meantime, our remote instruction continues. This week marks the fifth week of remote instruction. The plan has always been to deliver lessons in what is called an asynchronous fashion, which simply means "not live." In recent days, some parents and students have inquired about synchronous (live) lessons. We believe that nothing can replace the live lesson that allows spontaneous communication and interaction between the teacher and their students, but in a remote environment, live lessons that rely on technology have significant hurdles to overcome. The main issue is that live lessons mandate students to be on their devices at a specific time of the day; however, the student, at that scheduled time, may or may not have access to the internet, and may be in a household with multiple siblings with limited devices. Siblings also may be mandated to be online at the exact same time without enough devices or reliable internet, making the connection impossible. Coordinating schedules of our staff in multiple departments and grade levels also creates significant challenges that would result in colleagues stepping on one another's toes by scheduling lessons at the same time. Therefore, lessons must be delivered asynchronously to afford every student the ability to receive the lesson on their time, when a device is available, and the internet is working. This also allows students to spend as much time as necessary reviewing the content as well as the ability to revisit the recording as needed. Questions about the content are logged and answered by the teacher via email.

We recognize that, as this situation continues, the need for social interaction grows. Therefore, we are working on strategies that will promote live connections with students so that questions can be asked and answered, and students can experience an added layer of socialization. We believe this will enhance remote learning and support our students' social and emotional well-being.

Please stay safe and thank you for your continued support.

Sincerely,

Joseph N. Bollendorf, Superintendent
