

Dear Parents,

I hope this letter finds your families doing well, enjoying the summer months and recovering from a very challenging spring. As you may know, public schools in Minnesota are being asked to prepare plans for 3 different scenarios for starting school this fall. We have been working on our plans since the beginning of July and continue to make progress toward completing our framework. If you are not aware the 3 options that the Governor laid out are:

1. Students in school full-time
2. A hybrid with 50% capacity in the building and 50% Distance Learning
3. Distance Learning with no students in the building

Option 1, having all students in our building, is the best educational option, but it is the worst option for possibly exposing everyone to Covid-19. **Option 3**, Distance Learning, is the least effective educational model, but is the best option in terms of the health of students and staff. **Option 2**, the hybrid model, looks good on the exterior, but once we started to explore it, we quickly realized how difficult it will be to implement.

During the week of July 27th, the Governor, Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) and Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) have committed to telling us what option we will be required to implement to start the school year. This will give us about a month to fine tune our plans and make them known to our school community. What we are being told is that schools can choose to be more restrictive, but CAN NOT choose to be less restrictive. Meaning if the Governor says schools can start school using the hybrid option, we could choose to go to Distance Learning but CAN NOT choose to have students in the building full-time.

In one of the several guidance documents we have received over the past month they list 3 things that we all need to do to assure we have a successful school year:

1. **Trust one another:** We are committed to making the best decisions for our students
2. **Put away the baggage:** We all have times of disagreements. Let's set that aside and work toward what's best for all.
3. **Communicate, communicate, communicate:** No need for an explanation here

In the coming weeks you will be receiving numerous items from the school. Information letters and surveys are a couple items that will find their way to you. As much as I would like to believe everything is going to run smoothly this fall, realistically I know we are in for some difficult times. What we need from all of you is patience and understanding. Regardless of how many hours, days and weeks we put into these plans, they will never be perfect. The plans will never be able to address all the concerns, worries and needs of every single family. The plans will never be as good as the way it was 11 short months ago. For us to be able to really focus on the obstacles before us we all need to accept that the way things used to be is history, at least for now.

Social Distancing, sanitizing and wearing masks have become big part of our everyday lives. All of these things are critical pieces of our re-opening plans and we will rely heavily upon parents to help instill in your children that these are things *we just need to do*. Everyone is entitled to their beliefs and opinions regarding this pandemic. If you spend any time at all watching the news, you know there are strong feelings on opposite ends of the Covid-19 debate. As a public school, one of the main responsibilities we

are charged with is keeping all of our students and staff safe. Therefore, we will be relying on what science is telling us to do to slow down the spread of this virus. The details of what I mean by keeping everyone safe will be spelled out in our plans. We plan to present this to the community in several different ways to ensure all our students, families, community members and staff members know exactly what is expected of them while at school.

If you are interested in reading any of the planning documents I have referred to, you can log onto MDE's website at www.education.mn.gov. Right on their websites front page are links to the 100-page document created by MDE and the 16-page document created by the MDH. If you are interested in additional documents, the Minnesota School Board Association (MSBA) and Minnesota Rural Education Association (MREA) both have lengthy documents to page through.

We are very cognizant of the possible sacrifices that you as families will be faced with based on what the governor tells us and the decisions we make. We share your concerns about children being at home when parents are working; about making sure children are fed; about making sure children are receiving special education services; about children receiving the mental health services they need. Trust me when I say we are very concerned about the overall general health and well-being of our students and staff.

To wrap this up, please read the items we send and respond to the surveys we create. We will work hard to not overwhelm families with too much information. We understand you are busy and will make sure the items we send out are crucial in helping us inform you about plans affecting your family.

Enjoy the rest of your summer.

Stay Safe! Stay Healthy!

Respectfully,

Brian Shanks

Brian Shanks
Superintendent