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PARENT NOTIFICATION

June 21, 2020

First of all, thank you to all those students who made a heartfelt effort to engage in the educational process during the fourth quarter. Your efforts now will have a positive impact down the road in your educational career. We also want to thank all those parents who were supportive of their children's commitment to learning. We know it wasn't easy (it sure wasn't easy in my household), and your continued dedication will play a role in your children's future success – thank you!

I apologize that this is so lengthy, but I think it is important for parents to have a good understanding of where we are at, the issues we have to contend with, and what is occurring behind the scenes.

The "million-dollar question" right now is "*What is school going to look like in September?*" Well, unfortunately, we do not have a definitive answer to that question. Let me explain why. There are a multitude of issues that have to be considered before we can commit to a plan to re-open school:

- The COVID-19 virus still exists, and as time goes by, more is learned about how the virus is transmitted and how it can be prevented. We will utilize the latest information from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to help guide our plans.
- We, along with every other public school, must follow the guidance provided by both the Pennsylvania Department of Education and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. In some areas the guidance is vague, ambiguous, and in some cases it contradicts existing state and federal law. We, along with many other public school districts, are hoping the Department will release updated information in the coming weeks providing more clarity on the recommended reopening process.
- Under the current guidance, there is no way Bear Creek Community Charter School – or most other public schools – can reopen in the traditional sense. In other words, school is not going to look or operate the same as it did prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. The single biggest challenge is complying with the social distancing requirements. Schools simply don't have enough space to spread students out as required. In addition, social distancing requirements will also have a dramatic impact on student transportation, as the number of students that are now permitted on a typical school bus has been reduced by nearly 75%, requiring more buses, more drivers, etc.
- Bear Creek Community Charter School students reside in ten different local school districts, each with their own schedules and transportation systems. The majority of our students reside within the Wilkes-Barre Area School District, so doing our best to align our plan to Wilkes-Barre Area School District's transportation schedule for the new year is important. We are waiting to learn what the District's plan will look like, before finalizing our plan. Too many of our students are impacted by public transportation to not consider this as part of the planning process.

Although we don't yet have a formal plan to release, that does not mean we aren't working on a plan. We realize that things may change, and change drastically between now and September; however, we can't wait until September to plan. Mrs. Young and the Leadership Team began the planning process even before the school year ended, and we are now incorporating all the state and federal requirements into the plan so that a framework is in place. Once we get clarity from the Department of Education and determine how other districts are going to handle transportation, we intent to release the plan to our stakeholders. Some of the issues being considered are:

1. Whatever plan is implemented; the plan will be in place for at least one quarter of the school year. This will help parents and staff plan ahead, to a limited extent.
2. We cannot operate under the current social distancing requirements and maintain normal operations for 468 students; therefore, beginning the school year using a hybrid model is a distinct possibility.
3. School facilities will be reconfigured, where possible, to allow for in-school/in-person instruction while maintaining the required social distancing.
4. Because of developmental considerations, it is imperative that students in primary grades (K-3) receive in-school, in-person instruction to the greatest extent possible. It is equally important that all students receive some level of in-school, in person instruction weekly.
5. Students with educational disabilities will continue to receive accommodations and modifications; related-services such as speech therapy, physical therapy, occupational therapy, counseling, etc. will continue.
6. Distance learning opportunities will use one consistent platform, K-8, which will be the Google platform. Appropriate professional development must be provided to staff; students and parents will need guidance and support relating to this technology. The Google platform will also be integrated into in-school, in-person instruction to help students become more fluent in using this technology.
7. The school will loan student/parents equipment necessary to facilitate remote learning.
8. Temperature checks will be implemented daily upon student's arrival at school.
9. Although it contradicts our mission and core values, volunteers and other non-essential visitors will be limited. Visitors, including third-party support personnel, will be required to answer a health questionnaire and receive temperature checks upon entry to the school facility.
10. School operations will change so that the potential for cross-contamination is minimized. Whenever possible, teachers will come to students versus students moving from room to room. Computers and iPads will be assigned to specific students.
11. Additional daytime housekeeping staff will be engaged and new cleaning protocols implemented so that common areas are frequently sanitized. Teachers will be provided with personal protective equipment and sanitizing supplies to use throughout the school day.

12. Face coverings will be required for all adults, to the greatest extent possible, while school is in session. There are times when masks are not practical, however, use of masks or face coverings will be strongly encouraged among all adults. Masks will be recommended for students, but not required.
13. Large group activities and large group assembly where social distancing is not practical will be limited.
14. Food service operations will be "Grab & Go" for breakfast and lunch. Students will most likely eat in smaller groups in their classrooms or in other designated areas.
15. Students will be provided additional opportunities to stretch and move around within the classroom, as well as outdoors. Teachers will incorporate outdoor spaces into lessons to give students additional time out of the classroom. Recess may be extended.
16. Specials may be limited to ensure students receive the greatest amount of in-school/in-person instruction possible in core academic subjects.
17. Extra-curricular soccer activities will follow CDC and PIAA guidance. We are still hoping students will be able to experience this activity.

These are just some of the considerations being given relating to school operations during the first quarter of the upcoming 2020-2021 school year. As the summer advances, we will work to finalize a plan and share that information with parents and other stakeholders. Again, much can change in the coming months, so these are just considerations.

As the summer progresses, there is a lot of other things happening.

- We will be hosting small group orientation this week for new students and families, and will be welcoming our 8th grade students back on campus to bring closure to the current school year.
- Report cards will be mailed home on Wednesday, June 24th.
- The YMCA will be hosting the Power Scholars Academy Summer Camp on the Bear Creek Community Charter School Campus beginning June 29th and concluding August 6th.
- Staff will be coming back for a few days during July for professional development related to distance learning, and then again in September.
- We anticipate our annual summer packet will be mailed out to all families during the first two weeks in August.

As always, don't hesitate to reach out to us via e-mail over the summer if you have specific questions or if we can be of assistance. We hope you and your family enjoy the summer. As always, please stay safe and stay healthy!

Jim

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