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PARENT NOTIFICATION

August 13, 2020

Dear Parents,

It has been a few weeks since my last communication, and I want to continue to ensure there is an ongoing connection between school and home, as it is important that you know that the school staff is working diligently behind the scenes to prepare for a meaningful and safe school year, despite all of the challenges we continue to face. A couple things to note:

- Letters were mailed yesterday to all families (**Blue Envelope**) with information on each student's plan for the start of school, including their teacher, schedule, etc. Included in this envelope is a **yellow page** of important information that we ask parents to keep and refer to frequently – including logins and passwords for important online learning tools.
- A second, large white envelope will be mailed out today or tomorrow to each family. This will include all other information and paperwork associated with the new school year. Please review it in detail, and return all the necessary paperwork before September 11, 2020.
- We learned that our bulk order of student Chromebooks has been delayed due to overwhelming demand and supply chain issues. We don't anticipate receiving the Chromebooks until mid-November. Students who do not have a computers or Chromebook at home can borrow equipment from the School. There will be instructions to request school equipment in the envelopes you will be receiving in the next few days in the U.S. Mail. Be sure to respond by the deadline.



The other topic I feel it is necessary to address is the news that many districts are suddenly changing their plans and deciding on starting off the new school year completely virtual/online. Although many districts are justifying such a change "late in the game" by referring to the increase in positive COVID-19 cases in Luzerne County, in reality there are other issues that are impacting the decision-making process, including the inability to meet the social distancing requirements set forth by state and federal officials, transportation, faculty unwilling to come to work, and political differences between members within the district's governing boards.

Based on the current public health data currently available, Bear Creek Community Charter School plans on "staying the course" with a hybrid reopening model. This is detailed in our School Reopening Health & Safety Plan that is available on the School's web site. I would like to share our perspective and our thought process as to why we feel this is the best course of action.

1. Although Luzerne County is experiencing a slight increase in positive COVID-19 cases, based on the big picture, the increase is insignificant. Luzerne County has a population of 317,690. So when you see new cases of 15, 20, 25. . . . you are talking about a very minute portion of the overall population.

2. Comparing historical data for positive COVID-19 cases in Luzerne County over the prior four months, there is an obvious trend. On average, 60% of the positive cases reported in Luzerne County originate in the southern part of the county – the Greater Hazleton Area. To put this into perspective, if 20 new cases are reported in Luzerne County, in all likelihood, 12 of those cases would be in the Hazleton Area. It is important we make locally-based, data-informed decisions that align with the needs of our local population.
3. Children learn best when they are in school with their grade-level peers, and have direct interaction with educational professionals. This is critical in the primary grades (Kindergarten through Third Grade). Although technology plays a vital role in the modern educational process, we believe it is not an adequate substitute for direct, face-to-face instruction in a safe environment with social interaction among peers.

We continue to analyze public health data on a daily basis, and regularly consult with our Pandemic Planning & Coordination Team, as well as our public health partners. Our goal is to resume modified operations beginning September 8th as planned.

In anticipation of the question “*what will change your mind to close school and revert to 100% online/virtual learning?*”, I offer the following. The decision to alter our plan and move to a more restrictive phase of our plan – prompting all online/virtual learning, would be:

- A government mandate for schools to close or to move to a more restrictive phase of operations;
- A significant increase in positive COVID-19 cases impacting our local population (the Wyoming Valley) and creating a high-risk environment for our students and staff;
- An outbreak of positive COVID-19 cases within our school community; and/or
- Other factors beyond our control for which we could not overcome.

We understand that the ongoing pandemic and the overwhelming amount of information that is circulating can be daunting, and can cause unnecessary stress and anxiety for students, parents and staff. We want to ensure all our stakeholders that we continue to plan and to make decisions based on the most current data available, and with the best interests of all of our stakeholders in mind.

Please stay safe, stay health, and enjoy the remainder of the summer. Please continue to stay tuned to the School’s web site and to the Friends of Bear Creek Community Charter School Facebook page for the latest information.

Jim Smith