



District Administration Office

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SD129 TO OPEN 100% REMOTELY, WITH STUDENTS ASSIGNED TO VIRTUAL CLASSROOMS AT THE SCHOOL THEY REGULARLY ATTEND

Dear School District 129 Community,

The COVID-19 pandemic continues to have a profound impact on our daily lives. The evolution of the virus will continue to define how we work, socialize, and learn for an undetermined period of time. It is my responsibility as superintendent to keep abreast of the developing situation and to respond and adapt to protect the health and safety of the children and staff members in my care.

It is with mixed emotions that I will be recommending to the West Aurora School Board that *all students* start the 2020-21 school year in a virtual learning environment. This is in an effort to meet current public health guidelines and keep our students and staff healthy. Please understand that this is an extremely difficult decision and while we know many families and staff members will welcome the change, we realize many others will not.

As we look at metrics that have influenced this decision, I would offer the following:

- The recent decision by the *Illinois High School Association* (IHSA) to move “higher-risk” sports to a later date is a strong statement. If it is not safe for athletes to be in close contact for ninety minutes of outdoor practice, is it safe for them to be in close contact for five to six hours indoors during the school day?
- Also this week, the county health department disclosed that they will not have the resources to manage the contact tracing process. Without this assistance, we anticipate that we would need to exclude multiple staff members and students for a minimum of two weeks with just one

potential exposure.

- Recent guidance from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) now states that school districts should develop routines that would prevent the frequent quarantine of students who are often ill or who have illnesses that mirror COVID-19 symptoms. Since COVID-19 symptoms mirror those of countless other illnesses, this task would be next to impossible.
- Operational considerations that define how we separate large spaces in order to serve more students have now changed to require floor-to-ceiling physical barriers that also meet fire code. This is a difficult and expensive task given the size of our many gymnasiums and cafeterias.
- Lastly, there is a sustainability factor. Of those that completed the selection form, 40% of our elementary school families, 31% of our middle school families, and 24% of our high school families have all chosen the virtual learning model, we would need an additional 55 teachers to facilitate these sections. This number takes into consideration the collapse of several in-person sections and using conservative figures would cost an estimated \$3.3 million.

As we look ahead to the fall of 2020, I would like to propose:

1. We will delay the start of school by four days. Instead of starting on Tuesday, August 18th, we will begin on Monday, August 24th.
2. We will be “all-virtual” through October 30th.
 - Teachers will be instructing in both synchronous and asynchronous modalities.
 - All staff must work from their classrooms or offices.



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- We will begin to slowly introduce self-contained students and other special populations back to school in early September. We plan on growing that group of identified students.
- 3. We will evaluate our situation in early October to execute a plan that fits the environment and conditions at that time.
 - On October 13th, we will evaluate our situation and current conditions.
 - On October 23rd, we will finalize the most appropriate plan.
 - On November 2nd, which is the start of the second quarter, we will execute the determined plan.

We understand that with this new plan will come new questions. In an effort to be as transparent and responsive as possible, we will be clearing out our FAQs and will begin addressing new questions soon.

In closing, I want to emphasize that the virtual learning School District 129 will implement this August *will not* look like what it did in March. I also want to underscore that we are committed to continuing to work with families not just on academics but on the social and emotional needs of students, and we will continue to do our part to share resources related to basic needs like food security. This experience has sharpened the important role of schools in this community on all fronts, and we look forward to opening schools physically at some point in the year, when conditions make it safe to do so.

Sincerely,

Jeff Craig, Ed.D.

Superintendent of Schools

West Aurora School District 129