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Good afternoon Palos 118 Families.

Today, I'm saddened to announce that due to the new IDPH guidance I outlined in my update to families on Wednesday and our ongoing staffing shortage, we have no choice but to postpone our plan to begin the school year with in-person instruction. This is the most difficult decision I've had to make as superintendent and not one I make lightly. Since June, countless hours have been spent developing a safe and effective plan for reopening our schools for in-person instruction. Our board, administrative team, teachers, and support staff have remained committed to in-person instruction. But at the last hour, I can't help but feel that the rug has been pulled out from beneath us. To receive such onerous new guidance from IDPH now is not only frustrating; it's unacceptable. I'm not saying that our public health officials don't have our students' best interest in mind when they provide safety guidance to local schools but the timing of this release days before school starts is utterly disappointing and incompatible with the amount of time it takes school districts to implement safety procedures with fidelity. As a result, Palos 118 will begin school on September 8 with a remote-only program. For planning purposes, families should anticipate remote learning through the first quarter of the school year, however, we will be working daily to devise a plan to bring students back as soon as possible.

In my Wednesday update, I shared with families the frequent and prolonged quarantines and closures that are imminent under the new IDPH guidance. The unpredictability of these quarantines and closures will be nothing short of chaotic for families as students are sent home from school with little notice and required to remain at home for prolonged periods of time. In most cases, their siblings and families will be required to quarantine too. With teachers already supporting students attending in-person and remotely, it would be nearly impossible to support our quarantined students. That means students can be home for up to 14 days with little to no continuation of services, which is completely unacceptable. The disruptions to learning will be too great and require even more staff at a time when we are already facing an ongoing staffing shortage. I know many will disagree with the decision to begin school with remote learning, but I do hope that I've clearly and transparently articulated our rationale for why. I remain as committed as ever to opening our schools for in-person instruction in the safest possible manner. I just wish other government agencies we count on to reopen would have given us the support, guidance, and necessary resources to do so.

I understand the burden remote learning places on families. Working families have been at the forefront of my commitment to reopen schools. Also, I know all too well the limitations of remote learning for educating young children, but I am encouraged by the tremendous progress we have made to make Remote Learning this fall be fundamentally different than eLearning students experienced last spring. This year, remote learning will look very much like traditional school.

In the last several days, my spirit has been lifted by the many stories shared with me of families coming together to support one another during remote learning. If anything, this pandemic has made our community stronger and more dedicated than ever in coming together to educate our children. I thank you for your continued understanding, partnership, and at times respectful disagreement on these difficult decisions.

Next week, principals will be sending information regarding opportunities for students to meet their teachers in person. Although the start of the school year will feel different, I look forward to welcoming all of our students back remotely and in-person as soon as we possibly can. Thank you for taking the time to read this message.

Sincerely,

Dr. Anthony M. Scarsella
Superintendent of Schools