

Dear La Porte Community and Friends,

Today is a great day to be a Bulldog!

As we gear up for the holiday season, I want you to know that we are thankful for your continued support of our students, staff, and district. Great communities are the mirror reflection of the people within the community.

Our teachers continue to give their absolute best each day to our students. Our students have continued to thrive this fall in so many ways. Just this past week, our boys cross country team competed at state for the first time ever; we were also represented on the girls side with an individual competitor. Several La Porte High School varsity tennis team members were recently honored as All-District and Academic All-District. And our Mighty Bulldog Marching Band and Color Guard recently earned Sweepstakes in the regional marching contest and qualified to march in the area event.

The list of successes goes on and on and includes every single student and staff member who wakes up every day to achieve their goals in the face of unprecedented adversity. COVID-19 has impacted everyone in our community, yet teachers continue to teach, and many students continue to learn. More is needed, however, because an alarming number of students are not successful with the virtual model of learning.

With that said, at our November 17 board meeting, the board of trustees voted unanimously to return all students back to school on January 6, 2021. There will be provisions for medically fragile students and students in COVID-19 quarantine. **And make no mistake about it, the health and safety of our students and staff is our primary concern and we will not hesitate to return to virtual learning if the need arises.**

We — teachers and administrators — are grateful for the board's decision for many reasons, not the least of which is the high failure rate among virtual students — 40% and 24% for secondary and elementary students, respectively, in the most recent grading period. This unusually high failure rate has also taken its emotional toll on teachers, many of whom have said they feel defeated in their attempts to teach in-person and virtual students simultaneously.

Like so many other school districts across the region, state and country, we realize that there is no substitute for in-person teaching and learning, and not doing so could result in a massive grade-level retention rate for next year. With that, we invite virtual students to return to school sooner than January 6. After all, more time in class means a better chance at success, and these next couple of weeks could help smooth the transition from virtual to in-person when the second semester begins.

La Porte has remained strong during the COVID-19 pandemic. We were among the first districts in Texas to require masks for everyone, no matter their age. Our cleaning and disinfecting routines are rivaled by no entity. Neither is the safety and continuity of our child nutrition department, most of whom have worked to keep children fed since March, with little regard for their own time off.

Even during the recent Thanksgiving holidays, many of us rang each other's phones with plans to improve everything for students and staff. I have little doubt that we will be doing the same thing during the upcoming Christmas holidays, with a meeting or two to boot. The stakes are too high to put off any such conversations.

From the bottom of my heart, thank you for all that you have done to support La Porte ISD. Thank you for welcoming the Jackson family to this wonderful city and school district with open arms. We are getting through this — together. I am so proud to be a Bulldog, and to be succeeding against the odds alongside you.

Sincerely,

Walter D. Jackson

Dr. Walter Jackson

Superintendent of Schools