

IRSD Community,

As a challenging year draws to a close, I want to thank the entire IRSD community for its support, patience and understanding during the past nine months. Since March, students, parents and staff have had to participate in instructional methods never before experienced in our district. The initial switch to remote learning last spring and its continuation into the 2020-21 school year has certainly presented hardships for families and staff. I can't thank you enough for the sacrifices you've made during this difficult time.

This holiday season, I want to take a moment to recognize some of the heroes of the past few months. First, our teachers and instructional staff. Within a month of schools closing last March, we established a remote learning platform that allowed students to finish out the school year with synchronous and asynchronous instruction from their teachers. This remote learning model was refined and relaunched in September along with a hybrid model that has allowed some students to return to the classroom for in-person instruction. None of this would have been possible without the dedication and hard work of the administrative staff in our Department of Instruction. Then there are our teachers, who have faced the challenges head-on and worked tirelessly to provide quality instruction to children under extremely difficult circumstances. Their commitment to our students and community has been remarkable and I sincerely thank them for their dedicated service.

There are many others who also deserve accolades – our transportation department for making sure students arrived at school safely when the hybrid model began and for implementing safety and cleaning protocols on school buses; our nutrition services staff for offering free meals for curbside pick-up last spring and again when the new school year began in September; our IT staff for helping to mitigate the challenges of remote learning and for striving to make wi-fi available to all families; our school nurses for their guidance and expertise in managing the health and safety protocols related to the pandemic; and of course, our custodial and maintenance staff for making sure our school buildings are clean and safe for everyone.

But most of all, I want to thank parents for participating with us to provide the best possible educational experience for their children. The past few months have been difficult, but the resolve you've shown has been extraordinary. As a parent myself, I know how hard it is for families to manage their children's daily schoolwork along with all of their other commitments and responsibilities. I am humbled by the incredible effort you have invested in this task. But above all, I appreciate your support and understanding. During difficult times, you have recognized that our staff is doing everything in its power to provide quality educational experiences for your children. Although our learning models have been inconvenient at times, especially for working parents, you have given us your unwavering support and for that we are truly grateful.

When schools first closed in March, few of us thought we'd still be dealing with these issues in December during the holiday season. But unfortunately, that's what has happened. Please know that our staff will continue to work tirelessly for your children moving forward. Although the news has been unwelcoming lately with an upturn in positive COVID cases that has forced

us to temporarily pause hybrid instruction, I know there are better days ahead. Together we will weather this storm, and our school district, state and county will bounce back stronger than ever. I can't wait for the day that all of our children return to the classroom for in-person instruction, that the stands at our athletic and arts events are full and that students and staff can interact without having to social distance. I know that day is coming soon.

Again, thank you for your support and have a safe and happy holiday season.

Sincerely,

Dr. Jay Owens
Superintendent