



CHARLESTON
— CUSD NUMBER ONE —

History will be kind to me for I intend to write it. (Winston Churchill)

Do you have ideas for how to best end our school year? Submit them to cusd1@charleston.k12.il.us

April 20, 2020

Dear Charleston School Community,

I hope this message finds you safe and well. What a story is being written during 2020! As you probably know by now, Governor JB Pritzker announced on Friday that Remote Learning Days will continue through the end of this school year. Like most students and parents, school staff are saddened by the reality that our school community will not be able to reconvene in person this school year due to this public health crisis. Up to our Spring Break on March 16, our students worked hard to learn and grow in both the classroom and in extracurricular activities. Since then, the "schooling" experience for students, parents and educators has been re-designed in accordance with the Governor's Stay at Home order and physical distancing practices to protect our collective health, resulting in new ways to learn and work, increased emotional stress and new frustrations, as well as moments of epiphany, giving new insights to our work and daily lives. Now, we will close this school year with remote learning practices. While this realization may have been a foregone conclusion for some, it may feel like a step back for others. For all, it gives us the answer to question of "Will we return to school this year?" It also prompts us to answer other questions, such as "How will we recognize graduating seniors? How will we return items to school and secure our personal belongings from school?" and others.

To begin to answer these questions, first, let me assure our students and parents that our entire staff remains committed to learning and engaging with all students through remote learning, as well as continuing with our food distribution program. Yes, there are stresses and frustrations that impact us all, students, parents, and school staff – but, as educators, our purpose in choosing our careers was to make a positive difference in the lives of children, and that remains our first focus through the remainder of this school year. While every superintendent would likely claim that their school employees are "the best", I write with confidence from nearly 30 years of experience with our schools that our school employees truly are special people who care deeply for and give their best to our students.

Also, at least for those past 30 years Charleston has been known as a "great place to raise a family." Why? Because, collectively, the people in this community care about the well-being and future success of our children. We keep them safe, we nurture them, we teach them right from wrong, we equip them to think on their own and be contributing members of society. These past few weeks have proven that our school community is more resilient and more capable than some may have previously realized. However, the final chapter of this school year is yet to be written. Moving forward, the well-being and future success of our students should remain to be our collective, primary focus. And to everyone who asks, "How will all this impact our children now and in the future?" I say, "Children may be more resilient and capable than some of us adults may think; let's help them write their own histories."

As such, many of the logistical questions that usually are answered by simply going through the motions of a regular school year are now being processed by our school staff. Some of these questions involve returning school items and securing personal items, grades and report cards, graduation commencement, and many more. While school staff can easily answer and communicate some questions in the coming days, there are other questions that are not easily answered without the same collaborative spirit that helps to define the Charleston School Community. To honor that spirit and help students write their own histories, I am asking that students, parents and educators use the cusd1@charleston.k12.il.us email address to share your ideas about how we can best close this school year to make it most useful and memorable for our students. Over the coming days, we will compile and process the ideas to arrive at a "living" FAQ document to close our school year. Why a "living" document? Because some answers may already be determined and can be shared now, while other answers will take days or weeks to process before they are ready to share. We'll post the FAQ on our website and update it as answers develop.

Thank you for continuing to work together and supporting our students in writing their own histories!

With gratitude for our School Community,

Todd J. Vilardo
Superintendent of Schools