



Springport Public Schools



Providing every student with a quality education is a priority and the focus of all we do.

300 W. Main St., Springport, Michigan 49284

Phone 517-857-3495 Fax 517-857-4179

Dear Parents and Community Members:

Like me, you've probably read or heard about some Michigan school districts beginning to unfold plans describing how they'll open schools in the fall and educate students. Given the current circumstance of the health crisis in Michigan some of these decisions are reasonable and some aren't; most are dependent on geography and the resources available in those areas. While I appreciate the thoughts and energies that educational leaders in other districts and communities have been focusing on this issue, my focus must be on deciding what is best for our school district; which also means considering the needs and capacities of families particular to our rural area.

As the 2019-2020 school year winds down and students and parents and teachers continue working from home we all know this is not "the way we did it when we were kids." We're all used to "going to school" where we join with others and work in classrooms and eat and play together in cafeterias and on playgrounds. Normally school is all about working collaboratively; learning to interact in socially acceptable ways; honing creative and useful problem solving skills; and developing memories and relationships in preparation for the rest of one's life. Normally, we do this best when we're face-to-face with other people because most of these skills are difficult to acquire using a computer monitor. Going forward we'll have to be creative and flexible in order to do all this.

Educating students in the era of COVID-19 is, and will continue to be for quite some time, an extremely complex issue. We're in the midst of a global health crisis and that has to be our first consideration. How we respond in the short term to the diverse needs and challenges facing the families in our communities supersedes how education is impacted. Before we concentrated on instruction and learning, we made it a priority to provide meals to students and families and as much as possible check on their emotional and physical needs.

There's no doubt that our educators and our families have been and will continue to be impacted! In the span of a weekend we were directed to teach and learn in ways that challenged our capacities in many ways. Whether it was technology itself, or parent-child relationships or material needs, there was an extreme amount of stress placed on all of our systems in an extremely short period of time. That we've been able to function as well as we have is a testament to the resilience and creativity of all the participants!

The biggest question facing all school districts is how do we educate students in a safe learning environment given the current (and possibly future circumstances)? Students (and adults) are used to being in groups within classrooms, on buses, in cafeterias, libraries, gyms and teams. Going forward we'll have to consider social distancing, health screening, intensive cleaning and campus access in every decision we make every moment of every day.

COVID-19 is forcing schools and communities to rethink what learning and teaching looks like and how they want to participate. I've communicated with some Springport parents who've asked "what's the plan for educating students next fall?" After almost twelve weeks without seeing students on campus I can't fault anyone for wondering and at this point the initial answer is, "it depends." It depends on the guidance we continue to receive from Governor Whitmer's office. It depends on the guidance the Michigan Department of Education and State Superintendent for Instruction Dr. Rice provides us, and it depends on our parents, students and



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educators.

Educators around the globe are already facing these decisions as some countries and states move to open up their schools and they're beginning to show us the possible ways forward. Most have adopted drop-off and entrance protocols where visitors are not allowed into the buildings. All adult school employees and students are scanned daily for a temperature. There are staggered schedules for transporting students to and from schools as well as different schedules indicating which days students may attend school. Students are also kept in small groups for social distancing and not allowed to interact with other small groups throughout the school day.

My belief is that our plan for educating students in the future will consist of several options for learning and many health oriented protocols. With so many unknowns and so many moving pieces to consider educators will need to be creative and flexible. It's also understandable if parents (and students) are uncomfortable in large groups; some might prefer learning online only at home; some may prefer learning only in school but with conditions that keeps everyone safe; while others may prefer a blend of both.

While I can't yet say what school will look like in the fall I can tell you superintendents from across Michigan are involved in the discussions. All of the Jackson County superintendents have been meeting regularly to discuss possible solutions. We've also been communicating regularly with congresspeople and senators because they are integral to our success-as is the Michigan Department of Education and Governor Whitmer's office.

I can tell you that moving forward the input of parents and students will be an important part of any decisions we make so that come fall, we'll have in place the best opportunity for all students to succeed and remain safe.

Sincerely,

Bob Cassidy

Superintendent, Springport Public Schools