

Waitsburg School District to start school year in a fully remote learning environment

As you are aware, Governor Inslee and Superintendent Reykdal, along with leaders in the Washington State Department of Health implemented guidelines for schools Wednesday afternoon. These guidelines intend to keep students, staff, and the larger community safe due the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

Today, with the support of the Waitsburg School District Board of Directors, we have made the decision to begin the 2020-2021 school year in a fully remote learning environment. Our current community COVID-19 transmission levels and rates are far above what the Washington State Department of Health recommends for a safe return to on site learning. Currently, our rate of transmission is about five times what they have deemed as safe for even the hybrid start we anticipated. As we examine the trend, we realize the stark reality that we are going the wrong way.

Our leadership team has fought to continue to be flexible and adapt as new information came forward to prepare what would be the very best for our students and staff return. We understand that schools provide so much more than just academic instruction and we fully realize that we do not operate in isolation. This decision affects every child, every household, and every member of the Waitsburg community. Our schools provide support for working families, social emotional support for children, tremendous daily meals, love, and life lessons too countless to mention. However, based on the DOH guidelines, it is not safe to do this in person for at least the first portion of the school year (at a minimum through the first 9-week grading period).

Therefore, we shift our focus to a remote start that will benefit from all of our planning to date. Waitsburg School District's Full Remote "At-Home Learning" Model this fall will be much different from spring 2020. It will be much more rigorous with increased expectations for student attendance, engagement, and academic performance. We continue to plan to provide additional options and support for our most vulnerable and struggling students. We are implementing a structure where many of these students will have access to onsite instruction.

While I am heartbroken that we cannot return with face-to-face instruction this fall, I know that the staff of WSD will continue to rise up to provide a phenomenal experience for students to care for the academic, social, and emotional well-being of each child. Specific answers around items that I know you are thinking about will come in the upcoming weeks.

Thank you in advance for your great work thus far. I look forward to joining hands again to solve new problems with new solutions. Schools, communities and people are not defined by hard times, but how they respond to them.

Mark Pickel, Superintendent Waitsburg School District
