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Parents, Guardians, and Community Members,

On Monday, we will begin virtual school for all of our students, with the exception of a small group of students we are bringing into sites. The challenges will be great, and we have been tasked with meeting them. As I write this, I want to believe that we will be able to bring more students onto our elementary campuses on September 8, 2020. While our desire is a return to in-person instruction and we are planning to do that, I believe we have to approach the next two weeks with the idea that we will be in the remote environment for an extended time. The phase-in of our students to face-to-face instruction is beyond our control, and it serves the District no purpose to complain about something we cannot fix.

Each teacher will have a group of students that they will need to connect with virtually and deliver instruction to. Teachers cannot control the quality of the internet connection of their students or the number of students in a home trying to access on-line programming. Teachers want to work with your students and they are just as nervous as you are about delivering instruction in this environment. Over the next several days, teachers will have to continue to figure out what instruction is actually going to look like and how they are going to be able to deliver it when faced with very real issues regarding connectivity and access. If you do not have internet access please contact your building principal so we can help resolve the issue. If there is no way to deliver instruction on-line to your student, we will be offering paper packets.

In the on-line environment, it is more important than ever to establish a personal connection with students. I have asked our teachers to focus on this in the early stages of virtual learning. These personal connections build the bridges that will one day lead students over these turbulent waters and into a school building with peers. We have to reach out every child and make sure they understand that we want them to access learning. Early on this means that you may receive a great deal of communication from teachers. Please help them help you and your students. When our teachers connect with your students, it not only creates a learning opportunity it provides a way for students to express their concerns and fears about the coming year.

For every child, for every parent and for every teacher it is important to face the ugly truth that school **may** be on-line for the entire semester and possibly the year. Again, it makes no difference how we feel

about that personally. Embracing this possibility takes the power it has on our lives away. I think of athletes with prosthetics and the amazing things they accomplish. They could just say the doors to athletic competition are closed to them and quit, but they do not. They use technology, determination, and sheer guts to overcome barriers that many people would say are impossible. Our situation certainly is not as daunting as theirs, but it is a challenge we all must be prepared to face and help our students meet.

Across the country and state where full virtual learning has begun, the stories are all the same. Connectivity is terrible. We cannot get kids to log on. We had the entire district connection collapse. The internet provider's system was overwhelmed and collapsed. Those are all distinct probabilities as we move into school on Monday. Even today we are trying to address issues with Google Classroom that we thought were resolved this past spring. The amount of courage, flexibility and sheer patience the next several days, weeks, months are going to take will tax teachers, parents, and students patience and will to carry on.

We are in the initial stages of the greatest challenge educators have ever faced. Preparations will be continuous and change will be constant. For an institution known for its consistency over the years this is distressing to all of us. We are prepared for Monday, moving forward there are many more preparations that we will have to be make.

To quote Winston Churchill "I have nothing to offer but blood, toil, tears and sweat. We have before us an ordeal of the most grievous kind. We have before us many, many, long months of struggle and suffering." The generation that responded to that challenge: men women, parents, grandparents, children are referred to as the "Greatest Generation". How we respond to this challenge will be how we are measured. We did not choose this crisis. They did not choose theirs. Our aim as a community must be the same as theirs. "Victory at all costs-Victory in spite of all terror-Victory, however long and hard the road may be, for without victory there is no survival."

I have no doubt in our staff's abilities and capacities to meet this challenge. With each stumble we will rise. Regardless of the obstacles before us we will surmount them. Parents and guardians when you have issues please reach out to your teacher or building principal so they can assist you. While social media can serve as a good place for venting and expressing frustration, it does not provide an avenue for schools to solve specific issues. We do want to resolve your issues and create the best possible learning environment that we can. If you contact us directly, we will do our best to resolve the issues you are facing. God bless and keep our students, our staff, and our community.

Respectfully,



Gerry C. Washburn
Superintendent