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**Dr. Gerry Washburn**  
**Superintendent**

**CARLSBAD MUNICIPAL SCHOOLS**  
**408 North Canyon • Carlsbad, New Mexico 88220**  
**Phone (575) 234-3300 • Fax (575) 234-3367**

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Parents, Guardians, and Community Members,

As we start our fifth week of on-line learning, I want to address our current realities. Our county continues to be in a red designation. Our chances of reaching a green designation at the next update on October 1, 2020 are not good. The first official numbers showed Eddy County with a test positivity rate of 7.80 percent and 14.70 cases per 100,000 in population. The update on September 17, 2020 shows Eddy County with a test positivity rate of 8.30 percent and 16.30 cases per 100,000. While I continue to advocate for a return to in-person learning for all students, the harsh reality is that such a return is unlikely. The dates for updating numbers are October 1, October 15, October 29, November 12, November 25 and December 10 this semester.

For us to return to in-person instruction for elementary students, we have to get to a test positivity rate of 5 percent and a 14-day average of eight cases or less per day. We have some control over the 5 percent test positivity rate. The test positivity rate is calculated by taking the number of positive tests for COVID-19 and dividing it by the total number of tests for COVID-19. Currently Eddy County has conducted 13,694 tests with 694 positive results. Curry County, which is now green has conducted 16,294 tests with 740 positive results. If Eddy County had conducted as many tests, we would be below the 5 percent test positivity rate.

A new PED requirement is the random testing for COVID-19 of 5 percent of the staff, if we have students in buildings. We have to comply with this requirement. I also believe this testing will help get our test positivity rate down. The random testing of 5 percent of staff will begin the week of September 28, 2020. Some staff have strong feelings about testing and object to the requirement. I am asking them to put those feelings aside and cooperate with this effort. If we do not get the test-positivity rate down we simply will not be able to bring students back. Additionally, these additional tests may help get the cases per day rate down if we identify people who are asymptomatic. I am asking the City of Carlsbad and Eddy County to engage in a similar effort to test employees. I also encourage major employers in the community to test 5 percent of their employees per week as well.

To get our cases per day down is going to require people to follow guidelines for hand washing, mask wearing, and social distancing. Again, I understand that some of you have strong feelings about this. While I respect your right to make personal choices, our students need you to put those aside and follow the guidance. This is the only way we can get the cases per day down and we may also save someone's life. I am asking, no I am pleading with you. Please wear a mask. Please practice social distancing. Please limit your travel to essential travel. We have 7,000 kids counting on us.

I outlined the dates for making numbers to begin elementary hybrid education above. I was asked by one of our Board members when we could start seeing kids in person if we got the green light to do so. Here is the timeline for a return to in-person learning for elementary students in a hybrid model. October 1, 2020 is highly unlikely, but in the event that we were designated green we would

begin hybrid instruction on October 12, 2020. Here are the projected elementary start dates based on a green designation:

October 15, 2020 Elementary hybrid begins October 26, 2020.

October 29, 2020 Elementary hybrid begins November 9, 2020.

November 12, 2020 Elementary hybrid begins November 30, 2020.

November 25, 2020 Elementary hybrid begins December 7, 2020.

At this point in time no dates have been given for a return to hybrid in-person instruction for middle school and high school students. We do have the option of designating 6<sup>th</sup> grade as elementary so we would follow the above schedule for returning them to school. For 7<sup>th</sup> grade through seniors we currently would not start hybrid instruction until October 26, 2020 at the earliest. At this time, I have no indication that any date for the remainder of the year is being considered. For this reason, I believe we need to approach middle school through high school with the expectation that we will finish the semester in remote learning.

Realizing the majority of our students are likely to be in remote learning for some time, we have to continue to get better at on-line instruction. I appreciate all of the efforts staff have made to date. Our current reality is stressing students, staff, and parents to the breaking point and we are trying to resolve some of that stress.

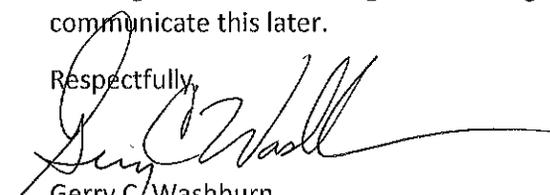
Child-care for staff and for the community in general is a big need. We have heard that quite clearly. Child-care options for staff are being explored and we hope to bring some solutions forward soon. Community needs in this area are significant and we are working with several community partners, but we will continue to have large unmet needs in this area.

Current data indicates that we have a large number of students who are not engaging with on-line learning. Best estimates place those numbers at around 1400 students, which is nearly 25 percent of our enrollment. We are engaging in home visits and reaching out in a number of ways. It is of critical importance that we connect with students and get them to engage in learning. The number of Ds and Fs is extremely high, which corresponds with the attendance issues we are encountering. While we want to hold students to high standards, we need to recognize that this environment is particularly challenging for a number of our students.

How we navigate delivering a quality learning experience in this environment is challenging and we have a huge task still before us. Empathy, flexibility, and patience are the keys to moving forward. Policies and practices that have stood us well in the past may have to be put aside for students and teachers to succeed. The questions we have to keep asking are: Is it good for students? Is this a learning problem, a technology problem, or a support problem?

Finally, we are reviewing plans for bringing elementary students back slowly using a five-student to one teacher model. Currently, I have significant concerns with how we can make this work and still deliver instruction remotely. I admire and respect that we have educators who want to do this. I am worried that in our effort to do what we know is best for kids we may overwhelm a staff that is at or near the breaking point. Proceeding cautiously, we are going to start slowly with preschool and kindergarten. While not optimal, this will provide our youngest students with some face-to-face learning. We are evaluating how to bring first through third grade back in a similar fashion and will communicate this later.

Respectfully,



Gerry C. Washburn  
Superintendent