August 27, 2020

RE: Emergency Board of Education Meeting – August 27, 2020

Dear River Dell Community,

Our goal is to safely re-open our schools for in-person instruction for students and staff. Enormous effort is being put forth to address the unique challenges of re-opening schools against the backdrop of the public health crisis caused by COVID-19. This process is made more complicated by the ever-changing guidance we receive from the Department of Education, the Department of Health and the Governor’s Office. While daunting, the challenges are not insurmountable given sufficient time to address all areas.

On August 13, 2020, Governor Murphy issued Executive Order No. 175 which allows school districts to delay resumption of in-person instruction to fully implement the health and safety components of the re-opening plans. Despite the viability of our plan, I am recommending to the Board of Education that we delay the start of in-person instruction until October 5, 2020. This decision does not come easily and is based on the following reasons:

**Staffing:**
Information from the CDC indicates that people with certain pre-existing medical conditions may seek job accommodations based on those pre-existing conditions. River Dell needs additional time to complete the process with those staff members seeking accommodations. In addition, staff members with school-age children of their own are facing unavoidable conflicts with the remote and hybrid learning schedules of their children’s schools.

Absences resulting from staff members who are unable to return to on-site assignments or unable to return full-time when our schools re-open will require the recruitment and employment of additional personnel or the increase of in-person class size to unacceptable levels.

**Personal Protective Equipment (PPE):**
Despite our best efforts a small but critical portion of the PPE remains on back order. We anticipate receiving the material shortly but are competing against all school districts seeking the same products.

This news is disappointing to many, but I believe our schools will be better positioned to resume in-person instruction if we begin with fully remote instruction.

Sincerely,

Patrick J. Fletcher
Superintendent of Schools

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