

Dear Families,

As we have been following the course of the COVID-19 pandemic over the past five months, it may feel something like a roller coaster ride. The highs and lows continue to transpire with the occasional curve in the track that causes us to be wary of the next curve we may or may not be able to predict. The past few weeks presented us with another curve as our state and local COVID-19 test data has shown us the challenges that lie ahead. As I shared with you previously, our planning teams have been working on a Back-to-School plan for the past several weeks, and the three models we have focused on are in-person, blended and at-home learning.

At this time, I want to share the first part of the [Back-to-School Plan](#) that was presented at the school board meeting on Monday evening. (The second part of the plan is focused on the essential in-person safety precautions that would be needed if and when we return to school. That section is being finalized and will be shared at a future meeting.) There has not been a decision made about which instructional model will be used to begin the school year; however, the pieces in place will help provide a clear picture of how we will be moving forward with each instructional model in the likelihood that all three may be used at some point during the school year. I am very hopeful that we will have a decision made within the next two weeks.

I have had several public health calls this week to review the county data and learn more about their school guidance. A few new pieces of information they shared with us last week are that they are in the process of creating gating criteria or metrics to determine if schools should reopen and when they should close. This means that Public Health Madison Dane County does have the authority to make these decisions based on the Dane County data and metrics (and right now, it doesn't look very good). They also shared that their current response to a positive case of COVID-19 within a classroom cohort will be to quarantine the entire cohort (students and adults). This presents many challenges for students and staff as it is possible that a cohort could be quarantined more than once depending on positive cases. As you can imagine, this makes in-person learning very difficult to conceive running efficiently or effectively as students could be moved in and out of school repeatedly and would leave us short-staffed with little notice.

I encourage you to read through the plan. The section under **Our Need** shares the challenges that each model presents and what it hopes to address. The section under **Our Plan** shares the instructional components of each model. You will notice that our plans include much more structure for at-home learning. We heard from staff and families that a more thorough, rigorous online learning plan is essential to keep kids on track for learning grade level and subject specific curriculum. We have already started putting those pieces in place by establishing learning management systems at all grade levels, purchasing additional online curriculum to support and supplement our curriculum, and providing professional development to staff to ensure that our at-home (virtual) learning model will be more robust than what we were capable of in the spring with the sudden closure. At-home learning will be made available to families even if schools reopen in-person.

If you are interested, our local cable channel WDEE films the school board meetings and posts them online for easy viewing. You can watch the presentation from Monday's meeting by visiting wdee.org. Select Archived Videos, Deerfield School Board Meetings. The first video that appears is Monday's meeting and the Back to School plan presentation begins at 38:50 on the recording.

We have a busy month ahead, and I know families and students are eager to know how to plan and what to expect. We will finalize the plan as soon as possible and make a decision on the instructional model that best fits our needs to ensure the health and safety of our students and staff. You will see this statement often but...**Our priority is to begin the new year of student learning in the best ways possible with the least risk possible based on the most current science-based evidence.**

Once again, here is the link to the Back-to-School plan:

<https://www.deerfield.k12.wi.us/district/Back%20to%20School%20Plan%20Part%201.pdf>

The roller coaster ride is not over yet (and we would have liked to have gotten off a long time ago), but we are in this together. Continue the great things you are doing as a family and for yourself that bring you joy during these summer days, whether it be swimming or getting wet at the splash park, biking with friends, taking family walks, learning new outdoor games or catching up on a great summer book read. Our best work for our kids is staying positive and being open to the unexpected opportunities this situation brings to us in new ways.

Stay safe and stay well,

Michelle R. Jensen
District Administrator