



Shenendehowa

Central Schools

May 2020

Dear Shen Community:

To say the last several months have been a whirlwind is an understatement. As a school district, we were compelled to pivot our model of teaching and helping students to learn in a remote, online environment. While initially seemingly insurmountable, the task was fully embraced by all. I have seen countless examples of quality instruction, of authentic engagement, compassionate communications and simple acts of kindness. Shen is in and we are in this together!

With just about five weeks left in the school year, I want to reflect upon the journey we have traveled together as a school community and share some thoughts on what school might look like when we open the 2020-21 school year.

The district has been engaged in both tactical and strategic approaches to not only navigate the uncharted waters of COVID-19, but to also position Shenendehowa for continued prosperity on behalf of the almost 10,000 students we serve. From ensuring students and staff alike are provided with:

- Technology and know how to effectively meet the demands of online learning through a comprehensive continuity of learning plan
- Mental health and wellness support
- Meals (breakfast and lunch) to ensure no child has to deal with food insecurity (food services and Backpack program)
- Clean, disinfected and maintained facilities and buses in preparation for students return
- Comprehensive budget proposal (2020-2021) that preserves high-quality programs and services.

In terms of our schools reopening, I must admit I have some concerns about the politicizing of mandates and the practicality of some of the models being touted to reimagine education. However, please know and have confidence that there are many people working on countless

“what it” scenarios, ranging from the “traditional model,” to a hybrid model (combination of onsite and online), to even the possibility of remaining completely online.

I am desperately hoping for the return to onsite classes, recognizing that certain parameters to preserve safety will be warranted. I am extremely confident that our students are ready and capable of adhering with social distancing protocols, wearing face covering, and practicing good disinfecting and cleanliness habits.

While I am hopeful by nature, I am intentional by practice. To that end, I have personally committed countless hours to serve on local, regional, and national committees that are scouring all nations and industries to identify proven practices and to even learn from their failures. As the superintendent of Shenendehowa, I am fully committed to influence those who are making the decisions that will serve as guard rails for our implementation plan.

I firmly believe that any reopening plan should begin with two goals in mind. First, the physical school environment should embody public health guidelines to prevent a COVID-19 resurgence and additional closures. Second, the plan must produce enough confidence that families, students, and educators feel ready for face-to-face teaching in school. A hybrid model, meaning that some amount of online learning combined with in-person classes may need to continue as part of a plan to address space constraints as part of a phasing into the school year.

We were hoping to use the provision of summer school as an opportunity to pilot social distancing methods, but the recent Executive Order from the Governor dictates that all summer programming shall be via online. More information is forthcoming to impacted students and families in the coming weeks.

The multipronged challenges we must encounter and transform into opportunities entails the accommodation of high quality educational experience, honoring the need for ongoing social interactions between students, and accounting for health and safety precautions within the limitations of school facilities.

While as a district we will have to comply with the governor's orders, please know we are strongly advocating that schools reopen in the fall. We recognize space and staffing limitations may necessitate both onsite and offsite instruction, but our goal will be to maximize onsite for all students with a strong emphasis on our youngest students, those with greatest need for in-person provision of services, addressing learning gaps, and providing social emotional support.

We have an ad hoc committee that has initiated feasibility analysis, including classroom spacing for social distancing, disinfecting and personal protective equipment, curricula

offerings and scheduling, transportation and routing, and the other many logistical nuances that round out provision of a quality school experience. We will continue to seek feedback from key stakeholders as we finetune plans based upon allowances rendered by the Governor via Executive Orders. Education is currently in Phase 4 of the Governor's plan. The New York State Education Department is supposed to issue guidelines in June.

In the meantime, we are looking at various scenarios and planning to assess the feasibility of each...effectiveness, capacity, and sustainability. We are not waiting for the state to send us a prescription on how to open our schools. We are working locally, regionally, and nationally to formulate viable options. I trust and pray that we will be allowed onsite provisions for the coming year.

As we have since the start of this crisis, we will continue to communicate with you as our plans for the fall evolve. School principals will continue to share information regarding year-end celebrations and recognitions. We are particularly excited about the plans being developed to provide our students, the members of the Class of 2020, with a bonafide commencement exercise at the end of the academic year. More information will be forthcoming from the principal in the coming weeks, including instructions to pick up caps and gowns.

Now that we are finally blessed with some nice sunny weather, I ask that you continue to follow COVID-19 safety protocols in your engagement with family and friends. Continue to encourage your children, our students, to remain academically engaged.

I thank you for your ongoing support of our efforts. This is truly about collective work and reciprocal responsibility. We are working diligently to ensure Shen is better moving forward. We are all in this together. Shen is in and moving forward!

Committed to Excellence,

Dr. L. Oliver Robinson

Superintendent of Schools

Shenendehowa Central School District