

May 21, 2020

Dear WCSD Families:

Today marks the official “last day” of the 2019-20 school year, and what a year it has been!

When the school year began on August 13, if anyone had approached me to offer a glimpse of the future, stating that schools would be closed from March 16 to the end of the year, learning would transition entirely to an online platform, and graduating seniors would be celebrated in a combined Virtual Graduation Ceremony and drive-through diploma pickup, I think I would have laughed at what they had to say. But, here we are.

There are three things I want to share with you today. The first is our unending appreciation for the accommodations that families made, as well as the professionalism of our staff, to keep students engaged in learning. I know it wasn't easy, but together we did the best we could to overcome obstacles and support the continued education of our students. We also kept students nourished and put technology into the hands of those without. We can look back at this shared effort and take pride in the fact that our entire community stepped up to face this challenge together without ever once stepping back. On behalf of the Board of Education, our leadership team, and our teachers and staff, thank you!

The second thing I want to share is our commitment to keep communicating with you over the coming months. We will need to balance timeliness with accuracy because there's still a lot that is unknown about next school year. We have a team in place to monitor the latest orders from the state, as well as ensure that we comply with guidance from health department officials, as we plan for three possible scenarios:

- 1) Schools reopen as we are operating now, which is a 100 percent distance learning model.
- 2) Schools reopen just as they have historically, with 100 percent in-person instruction.
- 3) Schools are given the order to open in a hybrid model that would have some in-person instruction and some distance learning.

Our planning assumes there will still be a virus and there will not be a vaccine when school starts. These assumptions are driving our considerations for what school operations will need to look like next fall. Most importantly, we want to make sure our operations comply with state orders and are consistent with the recommendations coming from health department officials. The landscape we are navigating is ever-changing, but we will keep you informed of significant developments and decisions along the way so you can plan accordingly for the coming year.

The third and final thing I would like to share is that no matter what the 2020-21 school year looks like, we are committed to improving the experience for everyone. We had 1,534 participants in the ThoughtExchange we held with families and 1,063 participants in an exchange we held for our staff members. Combined, everyone provided 3,567 thoughts for us to delve into. Thanks to the platform used, we know those top thoughts and ideas that were shared, and we pledge to explore how we can incorporate this thinking into future operations.

As you might imagine, one of the hot topics was remote learning. As a result of your feedback, some of the key issues being addressed include ensuring that students have access to digital devices and internet service, reducing the number of digital platforms used by teachers, and strengthening the expectations for teaching and learning (e.g., how much direct teacher instruction should take place).

Thank you once again for your patience, understanding, and cooperation this year. It is certainly one to remember, but also one that I believe will lead us to identifying and providing greater opportunities for our students in the future.

Sincerely,
Dr. John R. Kellogg
Superintendent