

Dear WCSD Families:

As a result of a conversation yesterday among area superintendents and health officials from several organizations, our district's executive leadership team has determined that the Westerville City Schools should open the 2020-21 Academic Year under a 100% remote learning model and not the blended learning model originally recommended. We will remain ready to transition immediately to a blended learning model at any time, but only when identified data leading to this decision shows the improvement recommended by these same health officials.

We realize this is not the news some of our families hoped to hear. However, several factors have prompted our decision. Though there was a recent short-term improvement to some key data being monitored, according to Franklin County Public Health and Columbus Public Health, the confirmed rate of COVID-19 cases in our region over the last four to six weeks, as well as the ratio of daily cases compared to the total population, continue to trend upward and remain concerning to them.

The recommendation from Franklin County Public Health and Columbus Public Health officials is that schools should not reopen under any model that provides in-person instruction, but instead should open under a remote learning model. Health officials said that schools could consider offering blended learning with in-person instruction only when there is at least a sustained positive trend in the data they are monitoring, and only if the county is also at a Level 3 or better on the state's Public Health Advisory Alert System.

As one of the largest school systems in the state and region, we want to support public health officials and their efforts to get COVID-19 numbers trending in the right direction. Health officials hope to see that recent short-term improvement become a long-term trend. By opening under a fully remote learning plan, our district is contributing toward their strategy to sustain and quicken this decline toward more acceptable numbers.

Given our decision to open the 2020-21 Academic Year under a fully remote learning model, we have also decided to extend families' ability to enroll in the Westerville Virtual Academy (WVA) until 4:30 p.m. on Friday, July 31. Families that previously enrolled their student(s) in the WVA will also have the ability to disenroll them until 4:30 p.m. on Friday, July 31, by following the detailed instructions they will soon receive via email.

Families considering or already enrolled in the WVA are committed to remaining in that program for at least the first semester. Given our decision to open in a 100% virtual model, if a family already enrolled in the WVA now opts to disenroll, please know that the opportunity to re-enroll in WVA would not occur until the second semester. Students not enrolled in the WVA will start in a 100% virtual model, but may move to a blended model of in-person instruction and virtual learning sometime during the semester, should conditions allow.

We will again be restricting community use of district facilities. Beginning Thursday, July 30, we are also scaling back to Phase 1 standards for high school and middle school athletics, marching band, and other student activities. Basically, Phase 1 means participants will work in groups of 10 or fewer and only for skills training and conditioning. Programs will be required to train outdoors with no access to gyms or weight rooms. The only exception is Girls Volleyball, which will have access to the gym so they may be more prepared if athletics return to a competitive model. Our participation in any fall athletic competitions will be delayed until conditions improve. More details regarding these program adjustments will be provided to families as soon as possible.

Given this latest information and guidance from health officials, we must do our part as a school community to contribute to slowing the spread of COVID-19 in our region. We will continue working with health officials and support their efforts to achieve sustained improvement in the data they are monitoring. Our hope is that conditions will continue to improve accordingly so we can soon offer a blended learning environment and eventually return to a traditional school experience for students. We will be sure to give families ample notice if and when these opportunities become possible.

Sincerely,  
Dr. John R. Kellogg  
Superintendent