

Tri-Township Consolidated School Corporation

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Re: Press Release

Tri-Township's Goal
Old Fashioned Education

Much like all educators across our state and nation, Tri-Township School employees have a strong desire to get our students back in school. Equally, we have a strong desire to do that safely for all involved. Combining those two endeavors has certainly proved to be the tricky part within the changing realities of a pandemic.

On Friday July 31st, the decision was made to delay the start of school and open remotely to buy ourselves a bit more time for preparation. As I stated on that day, the delays in obtaining cleaning machines, PPE, and social distancing solutions contributed to the decision. In the week that has followed that announcement the statewide educational landscape continues to be in flux. However, on the positive side, I have gained more definitive delivery dates for needed equipment, and health department social distancing guidance has improved. Combining these improved variables, along with up to date COVID-19 data, has us to a point we can announce a goal date of September 14th for transitioning to in-person instruction. At this 3-week interval, we believe we will have all the necessary equipment, signage, and preparation to move from remote learning to in-person learning.

Now, I would like to pivot and talk about our Tri-Township educators and employees for a moment. In the best of times, there are teachers, paraprofessionals, secretaries, custodians, and others who spend untold amounts of extra time preparing for a school year. They go well above and beyond any contractual obligation because the path we have chosen is a calling more than a career. Within this mess we all find ourselves in, our employees have taken dedication to a whole new level. They are working countless extra hours to solve myriad issues for providing a great education. There are too many firsts to list them all, but here are a few. This will be the first time they have to teach, while making sure 15 to 25 students are not too close to each other. "Please face forward", now takes on a whole new meaning and might test the constraints of any veteran teacher voice. This will be the first time they have to teach some students in person while also teaching some students remotely. That is a major change and not one made just by flipping a switch. This will be the first time they have to do both while wearing a mask. My point is we all want our students back with us as soon as possible. Its not always obvious that we are all doing everything in our power to make that a safe reality. By shining a light on those facts, I hope that you will grant us a bit more patience while we complete preparations to not just get this done, but get it done well. While we know our remote learning plan will be improved from last spring, we are keenly aware that in-person instruction is best for most students. Additionally, we are cognizant of the fact that parents work and truly need their children in school.

On a personal note, as the leader of our school corporation, I can live with the fact that I won't make everyone happy with my decisions. I can also live with the judgement that I was being too cautious. I would struggle with knowing I was too reckless and contributed to hurting anyone. I want everyone to know I write this today with nothing but love for our students and anyone that chooses to work in education. I desperately look forward to getting back to educating our kids the old-fashioned way.

As a side note, now that we have a path charted for in-person learning, we are continuing our high school athletic activities and preparing to reboot our middle school athletics as well. The social needs of all our students warrants our full effort to get back to normal as close as we can. Please do keep in mind that balancing safety concerns will continue to direct our decisions in a continually fluid situation.

M. Kelly Shepherd