June 10, 2020

RE: Closing Out School Year 2019-2020, Planning for School Year 2020-2021, Parent Survey, and FAQ

Dear Spartan Families:

As you know, June 4 was our last scheduled school day of the 2019-2020 school year. Typically, the last day of the school year brings excitement and even some bittersweet feelings as we say goodbye to one another and turn excitedly to thoughts of a summer break full of family time and relaxation. Yet, present circumstances are probably leaving a lot of us feeling without the sense of closure, satisfaction, and excitement that we’re accustomed to at this time of year. Perhaps you or your children are even carrying feelings of uncertainty into summer, concerned about the fall and what school will look like. These are all feelings to be expected, given the way the 2019-2020 school year came to a close.

With that being said, I want to encourage you to reframe your approach to thinking about the 2019-2020 school year. Rather than expending energy on things outside of our control (“what could have been”), I think it would be time well spent to reflect on the multitude of things - both big and small - that have been done to make the very best out of a very challenging situation. As such, I want to thank our Spartan families for the incredible efforts you put forth to care for your children, to engage them in learning, to set great examples for them, and to support them as they navigated the challenges of this most difficult situation. It has been a long 12 weeks for all of us! And while you certainly don’t need my validation, I do want you to know that I am so proud of our Spartan families. I’m proud of you, and I appreciate all that you’ve done to support your children and support the school district. Please accept my most sincere and heartfelt thanks!

With the current school year coming to a close, we are turning our focus toward the start of school in the fall. For the last several weeks, we have been outlining potential school delivery options for school year 2020-2021. We have used the following guideposts to outline each scenario: 1.) We will put together programming that assures, to the very best of our ability, the safety of our students and staff. 2.) We will remain dedicated to educational excellence and the highest quality programming for kids, no matter what mandates or constraints must be in place next year. 3.) We are willing to be creative and open to modifying our instructional delivery and teaching methods to meet current realities.

This means outlining plans for a variety of scenarios, from a traditional, in-person, face-to-face school day, to hybrid models with both face-to-face and virtual options, to exclusively online options. Our preference, as you might imagine, is to have a traditional looking school year in which we can assure everyone is safe and engaged in high quality learning. So, we are working with that goal in mind, and creating additional plans in case we need them.

There are still a great number of unknowns concerning next year. We are going to continue to take a measured, analytical approach as we move through our planning phase. An official announcement about the school year will come after the Return to School Advisory Council, Michigan Department of Health and Human Services, and Michigan Department of Education provide us with the guidelines and requirements we’ll need to meet in the fall. That information will be key to decisions about our instructional delivery model and what our school day can look like. Rest assured, we are working diligently on plans, and we will be fully prepared under any scenario to serve our students with outstanding programming in the fall.
We would like your feedback as we plan for next fall. I’m including a link to an online survey to collect that feedback. You can find the link here (below). The survey will be pushed out to you via School Messenger and will also be posted on our website and district social media.

Survey Link: [https://forms.gle/usdr3J9jZ2LdGye9](https://forms.gle/usdr3J9jZ2LdGye9)

We would like responses back by July 3rd in order to use them as one more piece of data as we continue to plan for fall.

In addition, here are answers to a few frequently asked questions about the opening of school and about summer operations:

**OPENING OF SCHOOL**

**Will Imlay City Schools be open in the fall?** Yes. We will be open in the fall, and the first day for students in the new school year is currently scheduled for August 24, 2020. We are currently waiting on information from the Michigan Department of Education to determine what our school day can look like.

**How do we plan on keeping students safe from COVID-19 when we reopen?** This is an area of great confusion and concern for parents and school personnel alike. While the Center for Disease Control (CDC) has released suggested steps schools may take to reduce the likelihood of the transmission of COVID-19, there is also a great deal of misinformation circulating on the internet and through social media. It is likely that many of the guidelines that the CDC posted in early May will be modified as the community spread of COVID-19 declines. While I can assure you that the Imlay City Schools will comply with all mandated safety measures, it is my hope that required measures will be much more feasible to meet than some of the current guidelines.

**Will we have sporting competitions this fall?** School sports in Michigan are overseen by the Michigan High School Athletic Association (MHSAA). The MHSAA has released some general guidelines of how and when sports can resume. Our Athletic Director is closely monitoring the changes in the rules associated with athletics, and he is in constant contact with coaches. The Imlay City Schools will adhere to all MHSAA and government regulations regarding athletics.

**What is our plan if we have to distance learn in the fall?** One concern with any pandemic is the phenomenon of second wave infections when, after a decline, cases increase again in a community. If a second wave infection were to occur, our Governor has already stated that it is likely we would need to resume “Stay at Home” orders, including school closures.

With this possibility in mind, we are developing a high quality distance learning system which would allow us to continue classroom instruction, grade students for their work, and keep students on-track with their learning goals. This would allow us to do what is called “blended learning” and “blend” face-to-face instruction with on-line instruction.

The first step in this process was the purchase of enough Chromebooks to provide each student with one for academic use. We expect these additional Chromebooks to be here by September. That way, if we must close again in the fall, all of our students, K-12, will have 1:1 Chromebooks to facilitate distance learning in their homes. While we do not imagine sending home Chromebooks daily with K-5 students, we could easily distribute these tools in case of a closure.

Along with the Chromebooks, the district is developing online curriculum that we can customize and provide online lessons and assessments for students, so there will be ongoing teaching and learning and minimize “busy work” in this scenario. Teachers will be training with this program before school reopens.

We plan to devise online instruction that follows along with our daily instruction. Students with long term absences will also benefit from this, as will our students when they are stuck home for more mundane reasons, such as snow days.

Of course we still have a number of families who do not have dependable high speed internet. For those students we will provide alternative (print) materials for use and will explore opening internet “labs” for students, as allowable.
What if I am concerned with my child returning to school? As mentioned above, we will have a robust distance learning system available when we return to school. If we have students who cannot return to school in August because of medical concerns, we will absolutely have distance options available for that child. The exact rules which would govern this type of program have yet to be articulated by the government. The bottom line is that we will do whatever we can to support our medically fragile students when instruction resumes.

Will we have orientation before next year? Yes! Open House and Orientation are very important components of a successful transition for students between grades and schools. These events will happen. The nature of these events remains to be determined, as we await government guidance.

Are we making student schedules? Yes! Our principals are working with counselors and faculty to develop class lists and schedules for 2020-2021. Even if we are using a blended instructional model, our students will have new teachers assigned for the 2020-2021 school year.

What if my child fell behind academically during the closure? It is expected that all of our students had some learning loss during this closure. Despite everyone’s best efforts, distance learning relies on instructional methods that don’t work well for everyone. So whether it is learning to read or learning calculus, some remediation for all of our students is anticipated. I have complete confidence in our faculty and principals to assess and remediate any learning loss which occurred due to our closure. We are assessing curriculum gaps and will make sure that all students experience the full K-12 curriculum during their time at ICS.

What if I am concerned with the mental health of my student? It is anticipated that several months away from school, combined with all of the uncertainty and disruption we have witnessed since March, is causing - and will cause - restlessness, anxiety and depression for children. If you have those concerns now, please do not wait until August to reach out to your child’s principal. We have dedicated staff who can assist you in these concerns. We also will be making student well-being a cornerstone of our reopening, including additional training for our teachers and staff.

Will the school district provide busing? Yes, but we do not know if there will be conditions placed on busing in the fall. As of this writing, we plan to offer busing as per our usual program.

How will I get updates this summer? We plan on updating our families and students frequently this summer. We will post new information on our websites, Facebook pages, and send information through PowerSchool Instant Messenger. We will send important information via mail, as well.

SUMMER OPERATIONS

Will modified food service continue this summer? The district will continue to provide free meals to families on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 4:00 pm – 5:30 pm in front of Imlay City High School. This will continue through Tuesday, June 30. We will not provide food service after June 30.
Will athletic teams train this summer? The Michigan High School Athletic Association (MHSAA) has provided guidelines and timelines for participation and student safety. Limited athletic activities may take place on campus beginning Monday, June 15. That is our goal. Detailed information will be coming from our athletic office and from coaches. In regard to fall athletics, our Athletic Director is closely monitoring the changes in the rules associated with athletics, and he is in constant contact with coaches. The district will adhere to all MHSAA and government regulations regarding athletics.

Are any summer programs running this summer? Summer childcare services are suspended at this time, and will reopen as soon as we are safely able to do so. All other summer programs have been cancelled, with the exception of high school credit recovery, which is an online program. If you are interested in this program, please call the high school counseling office for more information.

Are school facilities open this summer? Indoor facilities are typically closed after the end of the regular school year, and will be closed this summer as well. Outdoor facilities will be used by school athletic teams, as permitted.

The full ICS School Closure Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) document has been updated and can be accessed on our website at icschools.us.

In closing, I would like to once again thank you for your work during the shutdown, for your ongoing support of the school district, and for all that you do for your children. Your efforts do not go unnoticed!

I wish you a happy and relaxing summer break with your family.

As always, know our best thoughts are with you and your family.

Dr. Stu Cameron