

July 28, 2021

Dear District #7 Community:

Final preparations are underway for the 2021-2022 school year and as we get closer, District #7 administrators and staff are excited to welcome students in 2 short weeks. We also continue to work with our task force and area health officials to determine the strategies we can put into place to ensure a safe learning environment for students not only on the first day of school, but throughout the 21-22 school year. As we've worked with various health officials, I've learned some things as well!

For example, did you know that the transmission of viruses in schools is much more likely to occur than in the grocery stores or a restaurant? Schools are congregant settings – places where the same population comes together over and over again – different than you might experience at the grocery store or at any other place of business. As a result, the strategies used in the two settings to limit virus transmission need to look different as well! Did you also know that scientists describe mitigating strategies to prevent transmission of COVID-19 like swiss cheese – the more layers you have, the less likely there will be holes which the virus is able to transmit to others.

Although vaccines have proven to be very effective, there isn't one specific measure which totally eliminates the risk, which is why a layered approach is recommended by health experts – one that takes into consideration vaccines, social distancing, the use of masks, sanitizing and cleaning, among other strategies.

As we engage in ongoing communication with individuals at Madison County Health Department, as well as our task force and administrative team, we continue to receive updates on the latest data available to monitor the level of community spread. While our task force is not a group which will be making decisions about any of the layered strategies we will be implementing, their input has already been invaluable in providing a perspective of each of the stakeholders which will be impacted this school year.

Thank you to the members of the task force for the work they have done on behalf of the District #7 community. The names of the individuals serving on the task force are: Jill Bertels and Kristen Pfund (District #7 Board Members), Steve Stuart, Allen Duncan, Beth Renth, Adam Garrett and Cornelia Smith (District #7 Administrators), Sina Rowe, Christy Buie, Nancy Stahlhut, Lynn Padgett and Jennifer Fowler (District #7 employees), and Walt Williams, Tara Riggs, and Sarah Sturycz (District #7 Community Members).

A public hearing regarding District #7's Back to School Plan will be held at 5 p.m. on Wednesday, August 4th. Our Back to School plan will be posted on the evening of August 2nd for public comments, and a presentation will be provided at the Board meeting followed by an opportunity for public comments. The presentation will provide an opportunity for all district #7 stakeholders to hear more about the District's plan to ensure a safe learning environment for all students when school starts on August 11, and also how the district plans to respond to ongoing data regarding school and community spread. I also want to thank all of the stakeholders in District #7 who have called or emailed to share their perspectives, thoughts and stories about this topic which has affected each of us differently.

As a district, our goal is to ensure a safe learning environment for all District #7 students and staff, and one that provides the opportunity for students to participate in learning 5 days a week throughout this school year. Thank you for your input and for the concern you have shown for students and teachers in District #7. I look forward to sharing more information with you next week.

With Tiger Pride

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Patrick Shelton". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Patrick Shelton, Ed. D.
Superintendent