

August 2, 2021

Dear District #7 Community:

Our goal this year is to provide a safe learning environment for students and staff in District #7, and be able to sustain that learning environment five days a week throughout the school year. As a district, we know the challenges of COVID and the strategies that prevent the spread of this virus, but we also know and have learned that kids need to be in school. As a District, we want to keep that as our primary focus.

Later this evening, we will be publishing the proposed Back to School Plan for 2021-2022 on the District #7 website. This draft has been created through the work of the District #7 administrative teams, with a great deal of stakeholder input. We have had the input of our task force and medical professionals, members of the Board of Education, and our community through emails and phone calls. We have also received guidance provided by our school district's legal counsel, insurance carriers, Madison County Health Department and the Center for Disease Control.

At this time one year ago, we were able to welcome students back to school – although school looked very different. Many students participated in remote learning, many students were hybrid, if lunch was offered students were required to sit six feet apart, and we wore masks. Despite all of these mitigating strategies, last year District #7 had at least four outbreaks of COVID-19 that at various times, required over 500 students to be quarantined.

We are currently seeing a significant increase in the number of reported cases of COVID-19. With the different variants of the virus that are out, there have been more reported cases of children being infected and individuals who are vaccinated being infected. Just last week, I started exhibiting symptoms and tested positive for COVID-19 even after receiving two vaccination doses last spring. Thankfully, my symptoms have been fairly short-lived, but I will continue to follow the guidance of the health department and isolate for 10 days.

The only way to limit the spread of COVID-19 in our schools, and have all of our students continue to attend school under a normal 5 day per week schedule is to use the layered strategies recommended by medical professionals. However, we also know that the data in our schools and in our community will also tell us when we can remove some of those layers. We hope that day is coming soon. Returning to a normal school routine is important for the well-being of our students and staff, and our goal will be to reduce these layers as soon as we can do that safely.

Our plan will be posted later this evening, and an opportunity for comments will be available at that time on our website. I will also be presenting highlights of our plan at a special meeting on Wednesday, August 4 at 5 p.m. at Woodland Elementary School which will be followed by an additional time of public comments. We look forward to receiving your feedback and appreciate your support of District #7.

With Tiger Pride,



Patrick Shelton, Ed. D.
Superintendent