

November 9, 2020

Dear Parents, Caregivers, & Community,

The Public Schools of Petoskey continues to follow the guidelines and procedures outlined in our Preparedness and Response Plan. The plan was developed by multiple stakeholders in response to Michigan’s Return to School Roadmap and was approved by our Board of Education. In addition, we continue to work closely with the Health Department of Northwest Michigan through regular conversations, identifying close contacts, communicating quarantines, and monitoring our COVID-19 data within the school system and community. Our goal from the outset of this school year has been to keep our schools open for those who choose in-person instruction for as long as we can do so in a manner that is safe and healthy for our students and staff.

Keeping our schools open is important for a number of reasons. We know that not all students learn in the same way. Not only is in-person learning best for some from an academic perspective, there is also a social-emotional benefit when students can check in daily with friends, teachers, administrators, counselors, and support staff. Additionally, this fall has allowed many students to engage in the extracurricular activities they love, including musical performances and athletic competitions, culminating in an individual and team state championship for our Girls Cross Country program. Our teachers, principals, coaches, custodians, secretaries, support staff, and students have all banded together as one team to do their part to keep our schools open. I could not be more proud of the individual and collective efforts of all involved who have made this possible.

Through the hard work of our staff and students, our schools have been able to remain open. Our data suggests that, although we have had students and staff who have come to school who have been exposed or are positive for COVID-19, the strategies we have in place are effective in limiting its spread within our schools. The presence of a positive individual in our schools then prompts contact tracing and the quarantine of close contacts for fourteen days, during which time our students have been able to keep up with schoolwork via our online learning platform and ongoing contact with classroom teachers. This solution is not perfect and we continue to work on improving it, but I believe it is still a far better option than closing our school buildings and putting all students in an online learning environment like we did in the spring.

In order for this to continue, however, we need your help. We need everyone in Petoskey and the surrounding areas to join us in our efforts to stop the spread of COVID-19 so that we can keep our schools open and keep meeting the needs of our students in a safe and healthy manner. I know that many are tired of hearing about COVID-19 and just want to get back to normal. I understand this COVID Fatigue and will also be relieved when this pandemic is behind us. The only way we can get there, however, is to get back to the basic strategies that we utilized so effectively early on during this pandemic. As you may recall from back in the spring, our community effectively flattened the curve early on in this virus and all but eliminated it from this community for quite a few weeks.

If we all wear masks, keep our distance, wash our hands, and avoid large group activities, we can decrease the spread in our community. Though it may not seem like it, your individual actions can make a difference in controlling the spread of COVID-19. If we each do our part, we stand a much better chance of returning to normal, keeping our businesses open and thriving, and keeping our school buildings open and able to meet the academic and non-academic needs of our students.

If you are already masking up and following all of the protocols to stop the spread of COVID-19, thank you. If you’re not, I implore you to get back to those strategies that we know can help us stay open and stay healthy. Our students, our staff, and our community need you.

Respectfully,

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Christopher Parker, Superintendent