July 22, 2020

Cornell Families:

I hope this communication finds you and your family members doing well. The Cornell School District has been hard at work, especially the past few weeks, planning for the reopening of school. This has been a challenging task given the amount of unknown elements, as well as the almost continual change in guidance and recommendations from local, state and even federal organizations. Last Thursday, the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) released new, more concrete guidelines that we feel allows us to move forward in finalizing our fall reopening plans.

After much thought, consideration, and discussion it was decided that at this time it would be best to move forward with a hybrid model of reopening. What this means is that to start the 2020-2021 school year Cornell will be running at 50% student capacity, implementing both in-person instruction to the maximum extent possible, as well as remote learning. This was a complicated and complex decision with many variables. The health and safety of our students and staff is always a top priority, but we also identified the undeniable importance of having students in school. We feel we did a very nice job with the online learning this spring, and we made it work. However, there are many issues with online learning that are hard to overcome, and our students deserve to have the highest level of education that we can provide. We felt it was best to try and balance the undeniable importance of having students in school, interacting with their peers and receiving direct instruction, with the proper health and safety protocols that are necessary. If we were to open 100% this fall, there are certain health and safety guidelines that we just couldn’t follow. The main guideline being keeping students 6-feet apart in the classroom. If we operate at 50% student capacity, we are able to abide by all recommendations from local, state and federal organizations. The Cornell School District has two potential options for the hybrid approach, one of which will be selected. They are listed below:

**Rotating Full-Day Schedule:**
Students would be at Cornell either on Mondays and Thursdays, or Tuesdays and Fridays. Wednesdays would be a remote learning day for all students. The days that students are NOT physically at school they would be completing online/remote work. There are some issues with this, for example it will be difficult for teachers to provide direction instruction to the at home group, while they are physically teaching in front of another group at school. Also, parents would have to find 3-full days of daycare for this option if they aren't able to stay home with their child due to work obligations. Meals would still be served during the day, but serving meals to students who are physically at home will be challenging.

**Rotating Half-Day Schedule:**
Half the students would be at Cornell in the morning, and the other half would be at Cornell in the afternoon. While a student is at home we would be assigning additional work that the
students could complete independently. This would allow for the proper 6-foot distance in the classroom at all times, and it would also allow Cornell students to be at school each day. This option would allow each student to receive a breakfast and lunch, and cleaning would happen in between group sessions. This is the preferred option by Cornell Administration because it helps alleviate some of the online learning concerns that teachers and parents have, and experienced in the spring.

For each scenario, the Cornell School District would work with individual families to make sure all children from the same household are on the same schedule. Also, for any family who doesn't feel comfortable physically coming to school, there is a full 100% online option for them. We have been compiling a list of those families who contacted the school stating they preferred the 100% online model. If you prefer a 100% remote option, please contact the elementary or high school offices to communicate those wishes. We acknowledge that these are extraordinary times, and the District has to be flexible with families, and work the best we can to ensure that our students are receiving the best services possible during this time.

We would like to get input from families on these two options. A survey has been developed and the link to that survey is below. **The survey will close on Sunday, July 26 at 5:00 pm.** So, we are asking for a quick turnaround on the feedback. We are aiming to communicate the decision on which hybrid model is selected on Monday, July 27.

Lastly, the District is working on scheduling a public meeting to go over the reopening plan. That date will be communicated soon. Also, the District is creating a Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) document that will be shared next week. This document will continue to be updated until the start of school. You can put any questions you have in the survey and those questions can started to be answered.

We thank you for your understanding during this time, and we acknowledge that these aren't perfect plans. None of our options will be perfect for everybody, and we wish we could accommodate the wishes of all families, but we simply can’t. We are trying to complete the decision-making process by balancing the health and safety precautions we must follow, as well as addressing the academic, social, emotional, and mental needs of our students. I appreciate you taking the time to read this, and for taking the time to complete the very brief survey that is listed below. Thank you again, and more to come in the near future.

**Survey Link:** [https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/CornellHybridOptions](https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/CornellHybridOptions)

Sincerely,

Dr. Aaron Thomas
Superintendent