Smyth County Families,

I hope everyone is well. I want to provide an update on the upcoming school year. As you can imagine, a tremendous amount of thought and planning has gone into the reopening plan for our students. We have worked very closely with the Virginia Department of Health (VDH) and the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) in the development of our plan. In addition, we have had representatives from many different groups, who met regularly, to provide input and perspective as we addressed issues and concerns. We identified five major areas:

- Health and Safety
- Instruction and Students
- Staff
- Equity (of educational services and access to Internet)
- Nutrition

The safety of our students and staff has been, and continues to be, the foremost concern. We are following recommendations by the VDH. These include, but are not limited to:

- requiring both students and staff to wear face coverings when 6 feet of social distancing cannot be maintained
- requiring all students to wear face coverings on buses
- cleaning of surfaces daily
- encouraging frequent hand washing
- and daily temperature screenings of students and staff

Smyth County Schools will now begin on Thursday, August 20, with a hybrid schedule. The decision to use a hybrid schedule is due to the requirement of maintaining 6 feet of social distancing. Students have been divided into two groups, those who have a last name beginning with the letters A-J and those who have a last name beginning with K-Z. Students A-J will attend in-person instruction on Monday and Thursday (A Day) while students K-Z will attend in-person instruction Tuesday and Friday (B Day). Virtual instruction will take place on days when students are not in school. While this divide works overall within the division, individual schools may need to make slight adjustments to balance numbers. Additionally, all siblings within the same family will attend school on the same day.

While this schedule is not ideal by any means, I would like to highlight two things it provides for our students. Access to Internet service is limited in many parts of Smyth County. With this schedule, our teachers will provide in-person instruction at the beginning and end of the week. Additionally, food insecurity is also a major concern for many within our communities. We served 338,647 meals from March 16 through June 30. With any type of hybrid schedule, students will not be in person every day, which creates a gap in food delivery. With our schedule, we can provide enough meals for students as they leave on their in-person day until they return.
Earlier during the summer, we presented a questionnaire asking parents if they would like for their child to attend school in-person or virtually. If you selected virtual instruction, please contact your child’s school for additional information. Families who select virtual instruction may choose to pick up meals daily at their child’s school. Times for pick-up will be distributed by each school.

Meet-The-Teacher events will be held at each school by appointment on August 12, 13, and 14. Elementary homeroom teachers will contact each child’s parent to set up a time. Middle and high school parents please contact your child’s school to set up an appointment.

I know there will be many questions as we begin the school year. As you have questions, please ask them here and we will add them to a Frequently Asked Questions page that can be found under Families and then School Reopening FAQs on our website. Our Smyth READY Return-to-Learning Plan can also be found on our website.

Thank you,

Dennis Carter
Superintendent