



May 22, 2020

Dear Southern Lehigh Families:

As we go into the holiday weekend, I wanted to share some updates on the closing out of the school year and the start of next school year.

Since the beginning of this pandemic, we as a community have had to make drastic adjustments to the way we do almost everything. Our students have faced fear, disappointment and frustration, and we have all struggled with how to live in such an unsettled time. It is heartbreaking that our students have missed out on so many end of year experiences and celebrations.

Nowhere is this more painful than for our seniors. They entered this school year with excitement and anticipation of all the traditions and events that are part of finally reaching the culmination of your school experience. Instead they have faced a senior experience that is unrecognizable. The administration and staff would love nothing more than to give them all the experiences they deserve. We have continued to monitor the situation closely and remain hopeful, while at the same time taking a practical approach to planning. We are moving ahead with a virtual graduation ceremony which will be shared with all our graduating seniors. We had hoped to add more events as the situation changed. However, as you are all aware, our actions are directed by the decisions announced by Governor Wolf as part of his plan for reopening Pennsylvania. At this stage, Lehigh County is in the 'red' category, meaning a stay at home order is in place, with travel limited to life-sustaining purposes only, and schools not permitted to open.

There are many questions around what activities are permitted during each phase, and what that means both for end of year celebrations and for the start of school next year.

- Schools located in counties or regions that are in the red phase are closed to in person instruction. A stay-at-home order is in effect. Large gatherings are prohibited and travel should be limited to life-sustaining purposes.
- Schools located in counties or regions in the yellow phase are limited to gatherings of no more than 25 people and must follow Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and Department of Health guidance for social distancing.
- Schools located in counties or regions in the green phase may conduct unrestricted in-person activities as long as they follow CDC and Department of Health guidelines.

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As of May 21st, the Governor has not changed Lehigh County from the red phase, so we continue to be extremely limited in what we can do. Given that we are close to the end of the year, and are still in the most restrictive red phase, despite our hopes, it appears highly unlikely that we will be able to plan or hold events over the summer.

We will continue to monitor the situation closely for any potential loosening of regulations over the summer, but also want to be realistic for our students rather than keep getting their hopes up with dates that need to continually be rescheduled.

Clearly, this also leaves uncertainty regarding the opening of schools in the fall, and I'm sure students and caregivers are worried about what things might look like for the start of school. Please rest assured, we are working intensively as a team to create various options for the fall that can be implemented depending on the restrictions in place at the time. We will be seeking parent and student input in the coming days on what the successes and challenges have been with your experiences of online learning and your thoughts on fall options. Once we have more detailed plans, we will share those out with parents and students with enough time to allow for planning your family schedules for fall. Our goal is to be as clear as possible and confirm our exact plans soon, while also understanding that throughout this situation, information, regulations and guidance has changed quickly, so we may again need to change course with minimal notice.

I wish I had clearer news and that we had concrete guidelines for what restrictions will be in place in this county for fall, but know that we will continue to work with flexibility and are tirelessly working to consider every possible scenario. We will continue to focus on the shared priorities of academic success balanced with the physical health and social emotional needs of our students, staff and families.

Thank you for all your support and flexibility during these unique times. We look forward to continuing partnerships between school and home as we move through the next phase of this situation.

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SUPERINTENDENT