

Welcome Back Has Never Sounded So Good

Every August teachers, students, and parents look forward to returning to school. This yearly ritual is commonly marked with the purchase of new clothes or school supplies. Students are anxious to see their schedules or who is in their class. Our student athletes and band members begin the two-a-day rituals that lead to a season full of memories. In small towns across America, August activities are anticipated and predictable. This is not the case in August 2020.

This year is different for everyone. Our student athletes and band members are practicing with many safety protocols in place. These practices resemble other years, but require our children to adapt to staying six feet apart, keeping personal items separated, taking a health assessment before every practice, and wearing a mask when not participating in the drill. I admire our teens for meeting this challenge with resilience and commitment to making the best of a difficult situation. All of this is also with the uncertainty of whether or not they will even have a season.

Anxiety is common in our parents, as well. Making decisions on how to allow their children to return to school, yet wanting them to be safe, has been difficult. For the first time, Dover has offered a 100% online option to students in grades K-12. For many families, this option provides consistency in curriculum and student schedules. It also allows the child to remain in a more controlled environment amid all of the unknowns of COVID-19. We have 478 students being served by 11 teachers in this program. This is a new adventure for those students and their parents.

As the 2019-20 school year ended remotely with teachers and students being sent home with little time to prepare for the change, we looked forward to a normal start to the new year. As our community still deals with COVID-19 and all of the related health requirements, we recognize “normal” is not a reality. Dover staff members in every department are planning for three different scenarios as they start the year. Preparing classrooms for students five days a week is only one of the items on our teachers’ “To Do” list.

Teachers must also prepare for smaller class sizes with children attending both in person and remotely. Split schedules are being developed with time mid-week for extra planning, learning, and cleaning. Teachers are working with colleagues to create online lessons for the possibility of schools being closed again or to provide for those students who may be quarantined for shorter periods of time.

Our staff has worked throughout the summer to prepare for redesigning classrooms so that students' desks are further separated within the classroom. Preparations for serving breakfast and lunch in the classroom are ongoing. Bus drivers and custodians have been trained in new cleaning and sanitizing procedures. Common areas in our buildings are marked with signs that indicate six-foot distancing. It has been a busy summer for everyone.

In spite of all the unknowns and changes that continue to impact and direct the course of opening school, we are thankful it is August. We are ready to have our students back to learning in any scenario and look forward to the many blessings of the 2020-21 school year.