

## Fall 2020: Return to Better

As we look ahead to fall, many long for a normal school year. We all hope for students to return to our classrooms and playgrounds. Our older students are eager to join together to perform and compete in various arenas. All of the uncertainty surrounding the 2020-21 school year can be overwhelming.

While Governor DeWine has said he expects schools to be back in session this fall, we still await the guidance for what requirements will be in place to reopen. Understandably, we are getting questions about what this means for students, families, and staff.

We do expect additional state and local guidelines when it comes to our classrooms, cafeterias, gyms, auditorium, and buses. Because of that, we are planning to be flexible and prepared with several scenarios to ensure that learning in a safe environment happens. We will communicate as best we can throughout the summer as we get new information and make decisions.

While the health and safety of our students, staff, and community is our top priority, we approach the new year with a renewed commitment to serving all students. We are working to learn from the past few months of “emergency remote learning” and develop an online platform for those who may choose to continue online schooling, knowing it will look very different from this spring’s remote learning.

Our staff is also eager to plan for our students to be in our classrooms, whether it is full-time or only part-time if needed to meet guidelines. We are planning time in August to reconnect with our students and assess where they are academically. Plans are also in process to provide for each child’s social emotional needs. It is important that we meet our students where they are in the fall and provide the instruction and support to move forward.

Working to decipher all of the guidance and directives for schools can be difficult. We have organized our staff into four task force groups to analyze the information and apply it to our specific situation. These groups are focused on Health and Safety, Operations, Social Emotional Health Considerations, and Teaching and Learning. Whatever plan is developed for fall, we know that it must be carefully prepared, intentional, flexible, and creative.

Creating a plan is a challenge because our reaction to this pandemic favors isolation while school-life is built on socialization. Many stakeholders and perspectives need consideration. In the end, it will be an individual decision as to whether the benefits of returning to the classroom outweigh the risk involved. As a district, we must provide options that will address the varied needs of our students.

We recognize that returning to school in the fall still has many more questions than answers for everyone involved right now. The staff of Dover Schools is working to ensure our children get back to the schools and connections that are so important in their young lives, while still working to keep everyone safe and healthy.