Dear Fox Chapel Area Family,

Our team continues to be hard at work on our return-to-school plan. I know our parents and guardians are eager to hear those details, and I can share some additional information below about what you can expect for the 2020-2021 school year. I’d like to reiterate how much our team appreciates the patience and opportunity you’ve given us to thoughtfully and thoroughly construct this plan. While we know it may be frustrating to await key details, it remains important to us to follow three key guiding principles: 1) Ensure a strong educational program for any instructional model we choose to or are required to adopt; 2) Use evidence-based practices, such as wearing face coverings, washing hands, and minimizing COVID-19 exposure opportunities; and 3) Provide as much flexibility to families as possible.

As the COVID-19 situation and the guidance surrounding it changes, we will continue to review, modify, and refine this plan. That being said, we recently settled on some important aspects of our model, and that new information is included below. In an effort to clearly communicate additional details of our return-to-school plan, we’ve compiled a slideshow for our parents and guardians which can be viewed here.

- In addition to our fully online curriculum, we will now be implementing a hybrid, in-person instructional option. **At this time, there will not be five-day-a-week in-person instruction.** After consulting with a number of medical experts, we’ve concluded that a hybrid model of instruction is the healthiest route at this time for our students, staff, and the community at large. It provides us the opportunity to have smaller cohorts of students in our schools. In this hybrid model, students will be attending classes in person two days a week and participating in online learning three days a week. While we know this decision may be difficult, it is the most prudent option at this time.

- The district’s Phased School Reopening Health and Safety Plan has been updated to reflect additional guidance from the Pennsylvania Department of Health. This is an overarching plan outlining specific, required items. The summary of the revised plan can be viewed here.

- While classes are set to resume on Monday, Aug. 24, we expect that the first week will include a staggered start for our students. The staggered start will allow for smaller numbers of students on the first few days. Students can get to know their teachers and peers, learn the new procedures, and experience a typical day of in-person instruction. Details about the staggered start will be shared soon.

- We’d like to share an overview of the data collected from the parent/guardian survey we sent earlier this month. It can be viewed here. We are using this information to inform our work as we forge ahead with our return-to-school plan, as well as following health and safety recommendations from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC),
the Pennsylvania Department of Health, and the Allegheny County Health Department.

- The Allegheny Intermediate Unit, in collaboration with the Allegheny County Health Department and medical personnel from the region’s major hospital systems, created a flow chart detailing how COVID-19 exposure and COVID-19 cases will be handled for staff and students in Allegheny County schools. You may view the flow chart here.

- As you may have seen from the video we emailed to parents and guardians on Sunday, we have made a number of enhancements to our fully online curriculum, including careful blending for students to work directly with teacher, as well as on their own; providing small-group opportunities that include intervention, enrichment, and other support services; focusing on social and emotional learning and support; and using a consistent and user-friendly online platform.

We hope that these additional details provide you with some more clarity as you prepare your children for the 2020-2021 school year. We will provide the draft version of our return-to-school plan at a special meeting of the Fox Chapel Area School Board at 7 p.m. Aug. 3. Instructions for viewing and/or participating in the meeting were emailed to all parents and guardians earlier today and are also available here.

While this information may not answer all of your questions just yet, we are working to make our plan as comprehensive as possible. We also have an email address for families at return_to_school@fcasd.edu. We are dedicated to doing what is best for our students. We care, and we are trying to make decisions according to our guiding principles as quickly as possible.

Sincerely,

Mary Catherine Reljac, Ed.D.
Superintendent