August 13, 2021

Greetings,

As students and families begin thinking about the upcoming school year, school administrators and Boards of Education are optimistically charting a course for normal, traditional school operations. The purpose of this communication is to simply make students, families, community members, and staff aware of good faith intentions. Additionally, this communication intends to demonstrate that the Mecosta-Osceola Intermediate School District (MOISD) districts have spent significant time considering multiple options and have established a common framework and approach for the upcoming school year.

Recently, school leaders from across the state participated in a presentation from Dr. Morse, the medical director for numerous local health departments. Dr. Morse shared information about current COVID data, CDC recommendations, and local health department guidance. An essential theme from Dr. Morse centered on the idea of layering mitigation strategies. A graphic illustration containing multiple pieces of swiss cheese was used to show that no single prevention measure is fully effective. There are gaps or “holes” in each layer. By layering the strategies together, there are fewer opportunities for disease to pass through. The layers as **recommended** by the CDC and Dr. Morse are as follows:

- Physical/social distancing
- Proper mask use
- Regular and effective hand washing
- Covering mouth when coughing or sneezing
- Testing and contact tracing
- Good ventilation and fresh air
- Proper quarantining and isolation of infected individuals
- Vaccines
- Cleaning and disinfection

These recommendations are a combination of personal and shared responsibilities. Regarding shared responsibilities, districts will engage in due diligence to establish best practices to slow the spread of all infectious diseases. Districts are committed to providing all learners and staff the safest learning environments possible. Focusing on personal responsibilities, districts encourage and strongly recommend that families, students, and staff consider all CDC recommendations. At this time, districts are not planning to go beyond the recommendations of health officials and governmental agencies. As such, face coverings, vaccines, and antigen testing are being left to personal responsibility and choice. While there may be slight differences across the districts, most components/practices will be very similar.

In a recent communication, MDHHS stated that the number and intensity of prevention strategies could be adjusted dependent upon community spread. This guidance is practical and smart. In the event of high community and or district/building level transmission, local districts and the MOISD would work directly with district staff and public health officials to reduce risk and continue with in-person learning. Through this pandemic, providing students and families with in-person learning opportunities has been a primary goal.

One thing we have learned over the past 18 months is to be ready for anything. As was mentioned at the beginning of this communication, there is a high optimism when looking forward to the Fall. That optimism is balanced with a learned pragmatism that understands that nothing is certain. If the current environment were to change drastically, or if the State or other statute-driven edict were to be put in place, decisions to amend practice or change course will be made within that context.

Tim Haist, Superintendent
Big Rapids Public Schools

Steve Locke, Superintendent
Mecosta-Osceola Intermediate School District

Michael Bob Gover Jr., Superintendent
Chippewa Hills School District

Roger Cole, Superintendent
Morley Stanwood Community Schools

Ross Meads, Superintendent
Crossroads Charter Academy

Michael Sweet., Superintendent
Reed City Area Public Schools

Shirley Howard, Superintendent
Evart Public Schools