

Gibraltar School District

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Hello GSD Families and Staff,

December 3, 2020

I hope that everyone had a healthy and relaxing Thanksgiving! As we approach returning to in-person learning for those who elected it this semester, I want to review our decision-making process for determining how learning should occur for our face-to-face students. I also want to clarify the dates for in-person and remote learning during the holiday season.

GSD has monitored our quarantine and positive staff and student data these past three weeks during our latest closure and we have seen a very large reduction in both of these categories. Therefore, **K-8 schools will open for in person learning on Monday, December 7th**, and if there is no extension on the MDHHS order for grades 9-12 to be remote, **Carlson will open to in person school on Thursday, December 10th**. Additionally, due to the increased potential for spread that New Year's Eve celebrations may bring, **all K-12 buildings will start remote on January 4, 2021 and will reopen for in person learning on January 11, 2021.**

Recently, the WCHD issued an advisory letter that all Wayne County schools should close until January 15th. Despite the careful wording of this letter, we view the communication to extend and surpass the role of consultant in determining educational programming in the Gibraltar School District as defined by Public Act 149 of 2020. We recognize that WCHD felt the need to issue this letter and also that there are many districts in Wayne County that have different levels of in person learning including some that have not held in person learning since March of 2020. We also recognize the type of pressure that WCHD is under with so many communities all with unique needs and different types of data and resources. We appreciate the intentions of WCHD in its attempt to give guidance on a whole county level through its blanket recommendation and also know that when there is a blanket recommendation, there are lost opportunities to consider the unique needs and data in local districts.

Gibraltar School District has had a high degree of success throughout this school year by carefully reviewing multiple local factors in order to determine the safest and most successful mode of learning. Generally, the WCHD role has been to be in consultation with individual districts, including ours, in helping to determine possible spread within a school, helping with contact tracing, identifying additional mitigation strategies, and providing additional input on other factors that have arisen throughout our navigation of school during this pandemic. We will continue to monitor all factors as we move forward and continue to consult with the WCHD. We want to do our very best to ensure we have the most accurate information in making these important decisions, so we have also begun consulting with the Monroe County Health Department (MCHD) as we have many students and staff that attend or work for GSD who live in Monroe County. As new resources that help us make the best decision become available, we will continue to add to have the clearest picture of the impact of COVID-19 on our communities.

Please know there is no perfect solution to educating students in a pandemic, however GSD staff have closely monitored cases and quarantines and have been very effective with contact tracing our staff and students. We strive to educate our students in person, and will only do so when we

can keep our students and staff healthy in our buildings. We have demonstrated this commitment with our strong mitigation measures and also by closing buildings or the district down to in person instruction when it was warranted. We will continue to monitor all our student and staff data as well as our local city data and use these to make informed decisions about the best environment for learning for our students.

In the weeks leading up to our pivot to remote learning, district and building administrators sent several reminders to families about the strong possibility of remote learning as the numbers in our communities continued to rise, putting a strain on our resources. Below are some of the main things we look at when determining when we can have in person or remote learning.

1) Do we have enough staff to run our educational programs?

This means do we have enough bus drivers, secretaries, custodians, food service staff, other support staff, teachers, and administrators in order to maintain a safe and orderly building with students and staff present and in person. All GSD staff members are important and essential in running in person school. Staff members who are in quarantine due to contracting COVID or identification as a close contact, require a sub to cover their position. If there are too many staff who are in quarantine, finding subs makes the goal of in person learning unattainable. The district secured building subs for teachers at the beginning of the school year and once those are exhausted, the pre-pandemic difficult task of finding additional teaching subs is nearly impossible during the pandemic. Additionally, subs for custodians, bus drivers, food service, and secretaries, typically don't exist requiring other remaining staff in these roles to help out and cover additional shifts.

2) Do the number of quarantined students affect our ability to provide quality instruction?

Beyond the challenge of staff in quarantine, too many students in quarantine compromises the quality of learning for students who remain in the classroom and those who are in quarantine because it divides the attention of our instructional staff and creates additional workload that is extremely difficult to manage.

3) Will we be able to continue to keep spread out of the buildings as the numbers continue to be high in the community?

The district, in consultation with the WCHD, and now the MCHD, monitors the community spread and how it relates to possible spread within our buildings. If an outside event happens where students or staff are exposed to COVID, this could affect our ability to have in person school. GSD has done an excellent job mitigating the exposure to COVID within our school(s), however, outside activities and events such as parties, celebrations, and travel sporting events (to name a few), can cause a district or a building within a district to go remote due to the possibility of spread within the school.

4) Mandated to close

As with the governor's executive order in March for all districts to close until the end of the school year and the most recent MDHSS order for all high schools to close from November 17th - December 8th, GSD must follow all mandated orders to close. This includes a possible extension from MDHSS on remote learning for grades 9-12. This extension could be announced at any time leading up to the middle of next week. Mrs. Shultz, CHS principal, will communicate any changes in schedule if that mandate is extended.

Ultimately, I know that these decisions impact our students, staff, and families and have lasting impacts no matter what is decided. The abrupt changes we have had to make in the way we educate, work, and live can be frustrating. Knowing this makes me appreciate even more the flexibility that all have demonstrated by maintaining back-up plans for when our students must learn remotely. I also know from those who have shared their concerns with me that there is collective worry about the less than ideal conditions that we have had to educate our students in this year. Our staff, students, and families working together have by and large been the key to success as we have had to make these changes and will continue to be the key to success as we navigate in the future.

Your Partner in Education,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Amy Conway". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Amy Conway
Superintendent