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Mr. Robert Gold, Superintendent

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BHSD community:

This is by far the most difficult email that I have had to send to a school community in my 20 years as a school leader. Our teams have been working countless hours this summer to problem solve the logistical issues that we are faced with in bringing students and staff on campus in the midst of this pandemic. I attended a meeting again this morning with the Lake County Health Department, and it has become inevitably clear that we cannot open the schools for in-person learning while trying to meet the constantly shifting (and conflicting) guidance that has been put forth by the Center for Disease Control, Illinois Department of Public Health, and the Illinois State Board of Education.

Weighing the social-emotional, mental health, and educational wellness of our students with the health and safety of everyone involved has been the most challenging piece of this entire mess. It has become very clear that the environment we would have to bring children and staff back to would be extremely restrictive, unstable and substantially disrupted daily.

Please click [HERE](#) to view a joint letter submitted by school leaders of Gavin School District 37, Fox Lake District 114, Grant Community High School District 124, and Big Hollow School District 38. In this document you will get a clearer picture of the many critical issues we are trying to resolve.

I will promise you one thing as we forge ahead. We are putting our best foot forward in creating a remote learning experience that will go very far in meeting the needs for our students. It is my desire that the product we push out will be a model for how it should be done. We are placing significant investment in resources, and will put our efforts into instruction, assessment, intervention and in meeting social-emotional needs. Collection of academic performance data will be critical for us in this remote learning environment. We are in the process of scheduling testing sessions prior to the school year, in order to get a jump start on assessing our needs. You should have received another email earlier this evening regarding this testing.

I'm sure you will have many questions regarding what our remote learning "2.0" is going to consist of. There will be significant information flowing home in the coming weeks, so please stay close to your email. We are in progress making plans to bring students on campus for device distribution, assessment and introduction to various resources. I highly encourage you to virtually attend our August 10th board meeting, as we will be providing a full presentation for the Board as to the many details surrounding what remote learning will look like for our kids.

I do not take lightly the burden that this decision places on so many of our families, and the educational experiences that our kids are missing out on. I am sorry for the disappointment and frustration that this decision causes, and I can't reiterate to you enough that we want nothing more than to bring all kids and staff back on our campus.

Again, I strongly encourage you to view more details in the joint letter (found below).

Bob Gold

Superintendent

Big Hollow School District 38

July 29, 2020

To our shared communities,

This is a very difficult letter for us as school leaders to write and one we know will be difficult for our families to read. Since March, Gavin School District 37, Big Hollow School District 38, Fox Lake Grade School District 114, and Grant Community High School District 124 have been collaboratively developing learning options for the opening of the 2020/2021 school year. After months of extensive planning with community stakeholders, we presented to our shared communities options for blended/hybrid learning and fully remote learning. These plans were crafted with a clear focus on learning and developed in good faith and in accordance with local, state and federal guidelines provided to schools in June, 2020.

What has been a significant challenge for districts is the continual change to those guidelines, which are truly the foundation of our planning efforts. New guidance was released on July 23, well after our hybrid/blended learning plans were complete. Changes continue to be made on a daily basis by local and state officials and we are aiming to comply with a benchmark that continues to move. Specifically, the following are challenges that each of our districts have had to consider:

- Guidance on 6' of social distancing changed significantly from what was advised on 6/23/20. The Lake County Health Department clarified on 7/24/20 that if we are unable to maintain 6' of social distancing at all times within the building then alternate plans need to be developed.
- Quarantining guidelines from Centers for Disease Control, Illinois Department of Public Health and Lake County Health Department change on a daily basis. The current guidelines will result in significant disruption daily. Quarantine is required for anyone that has been in close contact with an infected individual. Close contact is currently defined as within 6' for 15 minutes or more, of which the time is cumulative throughout the school day.
- Additionally, new guidance was provided on 7/24/20 that any student or staff member that exhibits a COVID-19 like symptom must be sent home immediately. They are required to either quarantine, provide a negative COVID test, or a physician's note to return to school. This will be a significant challenge as the list of COVID-19 like symptoms includes symptoms of other common illnesses, i.e. runny nose, cough, sore throat.
- Illinois State Board of Education and Centers for Disease Control are now recommending all students be placed in strict cohorts to minimize potential illness and contact tracing requirements. Although this would impact each grade level differently, it is not possible to effectively implement all current educational opportunities in a strict cohort format.
- The required daily screening of students continues to be a challenge that we are trying to address. Students may not enter the building or a bus if they have not completed the self-health check. Identifying who has or has not completed the screening at the point of

entry is difficult. The process to then complete an individual screening and temperature check for those that have not completed the process is time consuming and complex, especially as it relates to children standing at bus stops.

- The Lake County Health Department advised on 7/24/20 that they are recommending a 14-day quarantine for individuals that have traveled to areas with widespread community transmission. With staff and families traveling and commuting from areas identified, this may impact both student and staff attendance.
- We were advised on 7/24/20 that more restrictive bus guidelines are forthcoming. Stricter guidelines will continue to negatively impact our ability to transport students to school in an efficient and timely manner.
- There are increasing rates of infection in Lake County, which has resulted in the county being moved to a "warning" status. We are reviewing those metrics with the Lake County Health Department on a weekly basis. Lake County Health Department stated on 7/24/20 that there will undoubtedly be cases in our schools and significant portions of our staff and students impacted.

While our districts, curriculums and communities are unique, we are similar in our goal to provide excellent educational opportunities while keeping students and staff safe. Ensuring that safety, given the continually changing guidance, has proved challenging at best.

After much deliberation, we are profoundly disappointed to announce that we will not be able to begin the school year in-person as we had planned. The difficult decision has been made to begin the year in fully remote learning, with the goal to begin phasing back in in-person learning as soon as it is safe to do so. We will provide our communities with a status update on or before September 20, 2020. As our districts are unique with grade levels served and the structure of teaching and learning, we look forward to communicating our detailed plans with our respective districts in the coming days.

Collectively, we remain committed to providing a quality educational experience for our students while paying close attention to the social-emotional needs of students as we continue in a remote learning environment. The strength of our districts is a direct reflection of the strength of our communities. We continue to appreciate your patience, flexibility and support as we navigate these difficult times together.

Sincerely,

Christine A. Sefcik, Ed.D. Superintendent Grant Community High School District 124
Julie A. Brua, Ed.D. Superintendent Gavin School District 37
Heather Friziellie, Ed.S. Superintendent Fox Lake School District 114
Bob Gold, Superintendent, Big Hollow School District 38