



River Forest
Public Schools

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June 10, 2020

Re: Planning for Fall 2020

Dear Students, Families, and Staff Members,

Please allow me to thank you for the amazing efforts that went into closing the 2019-20 school year as successfully as possible. While the circumstances of the last three months have been challenging for everyone, the manner in which our school community collaborated to support the students in our midst was extraordinary.

Our amazing faculty, staff, and administrators showed a great deal of resourcefulness and dedication, finding ways to inspire, support, and stay connected to students. Family members supported their children in numerous ways, from supervising and assisting student learning to investigating and introducing supplemental learning activities. Students worked hard to engage fully in distance learning experiences, complete assignments in new ways, and reinvent themselves as “remote learners” during a historic global pandemic. Extraordinary, in every way.

Yet, the urgency of the circumstances at hand means that there is a tremendous need to stay focused on the future and plan for the school year to come. Even at this stage, school districts across Illinois (and most of the nation) are still uncertain about the way that we will be permitted to return to school this fall under COVID-19. Guidance from the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) and the Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH) is expected to be forthcoming about how school districts should plan for the start of the 2020-21 school year. Still, public health dynamics might change after the guidance is issued, requiring school districts to pivot and modify initial plans. It is obviously important that our school district be able to adjust our plans to accommodate various situations as they may unfold.

Coupled with this is the clear need for our school district to continue to commit fully to our ongoing equity, inclusiveness, and student belonging goals. Until every student, family, and staff member is confident that their voice, experience, and contributions are honored and valued in our school community, we still have vital work to do. I am grateful to the many individuals who are already contributing toward these goals, whether through their role on the D90 Inclusiveness Advisory Board, the Board of Education Equity Committee, or the District Equity Network Team, or the many less public – but no less important – steps that are taken to advance our progress in classrooms and households throughout our school community. Our students are watching the equity decisions we make and the actions we take, and we must commit to pursuing this work with urgency in an increasingly systematic and intentional way.

The most important consideration for the future, bar none, is the need to ensure robust social-emotional programming and services for all of our students. This effort is necessary for several reasons. First, without this foundational element in place, no student can be expected to learn and achieve fully. Secondly, our students (and families and staff) have been through a great deal of trauma recently. Between the latest examples of brutality in our society against black people, fear

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about the impact of COVID-19 on loved ones, questions about racial injustice, and the economic impact of the pandemic on individuals and households, our students are in tumult. If we do not take care to put their social-emotional needs at the fore, it will be harder for our students to grow in healthy and productive ways. For their well-being as individuals, we need to arm our children with the knowledge and skills that will help them to activate their growth mindset, increase their relationship-building capacity, and become more empathetic. For all of these reasons, District 90 needs to commit to prioritizing our students' social-emotional wellness as the foundation upon which to further build their academic careers.

As to student instruction this fall, D90 strongly prefers to implement in-person instruction over remote learning, but only if it can be conducted safely. Not only is in-person instruction preferred to provide the highest quality of teaching and learning, but it also fosters optimal social-emotional and physical wellness for our students. Health and education agencies have learned much over these last months about the ways that COVID-19 is typically transmitted, what practices can lessen the chances of transmission, and how key practices help to mitigate the impact of the disease on a given population. To prepare for all options, District 90 is in the process of developing frameworks for three different "return to school" scenarios. The first scenario reflects the possibility of a "full in-person" model where students and staff would be allowed to return to school under a significant number of safety restrictions (i.e., social distancing, PPE requirements, etc.). The second scenario would allow for several variations on a "hybrid" model combining elements of both "in-person" and remote learning. Depending on circumstances, the "hybrid" model would be implemented in response to health directives about school and classroom occupancy, disinfection requirements, social distancing guidelines, and rates of disease occurrence. The third scenario reflects a return to school in a remote learning model, which would be implemented if it was impossible to bring students and staff back to school safely in person. Unless mandated by safety concerns, this is admittedly the least preferred alternative.

Remote learning during the spring months was implemented with very little time to plan and virtually no prior experience to guide our way. However, if some type of remote learning is needed in the future, we have learned a great deal about which elements were successful and which can be improved. The ISBE guidance pertaining to remote learning (issued in March 2020) governed the details of the D90 Remote Learning Plan that was implemented over the last three months. While our faculty and staff worked very hard to make remote learning successful for the students, we feel as though District 90 can modify our plan to make remote learning more effective if it is needed again in the future. To gain a better understanding about individuals' experiences with remote learning, D90 administered perception surveys recently to students, staff, and families. We intend to use the feedback from these surveys to refine the D90 Remote Learning Plan to better meet the needs of all throughout our school community if remote learning becomes necessary.

To prepare for this fall, District 90 has established four leadership teams. Two of these leadership teams will serve as advisory boards. These include the Remote Learning Action Team (RLAT) and the Safety and Operations Action Team (SOAT). The composition of these teams is made up of various stakeholders, including faculty, staff, administrators, parents/family members, and students. The job of the RLAT is to review the District's remote learning program and make recommendations for improvement in case it is necessary to implement remote learning again in the future. The SOAT will be focused on the operational protocols and safety considerations that will be needed to return students and staff to school this fall in the safest possible manner. If we

are able to reconvene students and staff in person, the planning and implementation will be complex and must be undertaken thoughtfully, in strict accordance with health directives.

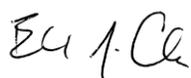
Two other leadership teams will also be developed this summer to address other critical areas. These teams will be comprised predominantly of District 90 employees with specific expertise or experience. The first of these teams is the Special Education/Related Service Team (SERST). This team will be focused on refining the way that special education and related services will be provided for students this fall, in light of the various program challenges and limitations that may occur. Finally, the Social-Emotional Wellness Team (SEWT) will be dedicated to expanding the effectiveness of our social-emotional wellness efforts, with strong emphases placed on student belonging, student voice, and the need to foster even stronger relationships amongst all groups and individuals. This work will be conducted with the support of our external equity partner, the National Equity Project (NEP), and integrated into the District 90 Strategic Plan.

Finally, this summer we will need to address the issue of content that was not taught (or not taught fully) over the last three months. As the students transition up to their next grade this fall, it is critical that teachers in the receiving grades be prepared to introduce or reinforce instructional content that was not presented previously. During the Teacher Institute Days on June 11-12, District 90 teachers will be working together by grade levels and departments to identify the content that will need to be taught or reinforced this fall and whether to compact the current curricula, if needed. Teachers will then complete modified curriculum units this summer that will be used to instruct the students in the 2020-21 school year. Students will be assessed as soon as practical in September to identify potential intervention needs, and our Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MtSS) approach will be used to address them. Students who have more pronounced needs will be considered for additional intervention programming offered outside the regular school day.

Please be assured that we will continue to keep the school community apprised of our planning progress in the coming weeks and strive to share any confirmed information about the new school year as soon as possible. We understand that families need to plan and make arrangements about matters of scheduling and childcare and that the present uncertainty is burdensome. Thank you for your trust and support as we work to devise plans that are thoughtful, responsible, and prioritize the safety of our students and staff at all times while we await further guidance from ISBE and IDPH.

Please have a wonderful start to the summer, and thank you for taking the time to read this lengthy letter. I hope that you have the chance to relax a bit and spend some time with family and friends very soon.

With appreciation,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ed Condon". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Ed Condon, Ph.D.
Superintendent