August 21, 2020

Dear Holly Area Schools Families,

Earlier this week, I sent a communication with a brief update regarding our district’s Return to Learn Plan. Today, I am providing our students, parents, and staff with information regarding our district’s progress to reopen schools in a safe and responsible manner.

Beyond the many required protocols that must be implemented to reopen school for In-Person learning, our district has acquired close to 800 student desks to replace smaller tables. Approximately half of these desks were in storage or provided through a partnership with another district. The remaining desks were purchased as a long-term investment that aligns with our vision for flexible and collaborative learning. These desks increase the distance among students in our classrooms at each level.

Our district also ordered over 150 tables to support safe lunch protocols. This allows students to spread out in larger areas during lunch at each site to increase the distance among students. Both projects, the implementation of lunch tables and individual student desks, are scheduled to be completed by the second week of September.

Last Friday, during a Press Conference with the Governor’s office, we received updates supporting the reopening of schools. A mitigation strategy that Holly Area Schools has adopted at all levels is "cohorting." Dr. Khaldun, Chief Medical Executive and Chief Deputy Director for Health and Human Services, highlighted this powerful strategy. It is one that many districts have not been able to implement. Our building admin teams spent several weeks constructing a schedule that adopts a cohorting model.

While there has been considerable progress, there are still some issues that need to be addressed. One challenge that our district is still facing is the hiring of individuals to work in our custodial department. Meeting the required protocols creates greater demands including the need for additional staff. We continue to work with our contracted partner for these services. While the posting has been out for weeks, filling these vacancies is critical. We are increasing our advertisement methods as a strategy to fill these positions.

We are also developing our Transportation routes based on the Commitment Form completed during the Skyward Online Verification process. Routes are being modified to exclude students of parents that indicated there was no need for transportation.
Please know the deadline to select In-Person Learning or 100% Virtual Learning has passed in order to appropriately staff courses and classrooms at all levels. Anyone who did not complete this process has been scheduled into the In-Person option. Please remember that In-Person learning has been delayed until further notice.

Lastly, I participated in meetings again this week with our Governor’s Office and our County Health Department around the topics of COVID-19 testing turnaround time, a reliable contact tracing process, and specific metrics for positivity rates.

The Oakland County Health Department expressed that they are making progress with facilitating much faster turnaround times with COVID-19 testing. We hope to learn more next week regarding specific testing sites across the county for symptomatic students and staff. This will allow for a more reliable process to institute necessary and accurate quarantine measures in the event of a positive test.

From the Governor’s Office, I learned that MDHHS, the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services, is developing a tool in partnership with a subcommittee of local health departments that provide specific epidemiological metrics on how positivity rates translate into the risk level for In-Person Learning. This is a resource for schools that has been provided in other states. I will continue to inquire on when our local health department will have access to this tool and be able to support our district.

We look forward to hearing more from the Oakland County Health Department as they prepare resources and a clear process to support the reopening of schools.

As you can see, we continue to make progress toward reopening with an In-Person option. We are continuing to assess the situation and actively pursue the essential support to reopen our schools in a safe and responsible manner.

We will continue to provide our families with regular updates. I appreciate your continued support and patience through this extensive process of reopening our school district. The needs of our students, staff, and families and our first priority for returning to school is ensuring the physical and mental well-being of our school community.

Thank you for all continued support and understanding.

Sincerely,

Scott M. Roper, Superintendent