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February 16, 2022

Dear Queen Bee 16 Families,

I hope that this letter finds you well and enjoying the temporary relief from the recent cold spell. I have some positive information to share with you, as well as an update, and a preview of our next steps in managing our way through the pandemic. It is my hope that you enjoy the good news, the update, and the preview of our next steps. It is also my hope that we all continue to be patient and understanding of one another despite the frustrating circumstances surrounding us all.

I am happy to report that many of the data points upon which we rely are trending in a positive direction. The key indicator of case positivity continues to decline and are now indicating that our risk level on that metric has lowered from Substantial to Moderate. Additionally, we are seeing very few student or staff cases of COVID-19 over the past few weeks, and I am happy to report that we have experienced minimal instances of Student-to-Student or Teacher-to-Teacher Transmission in our schools throughout the entire pandemic. We have worked hard to maintain a healthy and safe school environment for our students and staff, and we will continue to do so.

There is no single mitigation or strategy that we have relied on to achieve an acceptable level of safety in our schools. The reality is that we have employed a layered approach to mitigate the spread of COVID in our schools, and the different layers work together to accomplish the goal of slowing or mitigating spread. As we have from the beginning, we lower mitigations when the threat is low, and we increase the mitigations when the threat of spread rises. One feature of our plan has been and will be that we remove one layer at a time when the threat lowers. We do this to ensure that we understand the impact of that change so that we can respond if it doesn't have the desired effect. For example, we have watched the data closely as we have been able to shorten the mandatory Quarantine Periods from 24 to 14 to 10 and now to 5 days. Thankfully, these significant reductions did not lead to increases in student or staff infection. We would have increased the period of Quarantine if the levels had increased.

We are currently working on the next level of un-layering mitigations as our data continues to improve. The next layer of mitigation to be considered will be the value of mandatory masking in our schools. As you know, this has become the most divisive issue within the larger discussion of mitigation strategies, and we understand that there are strong feelings and emotions on both sides of the issues. Our position is simple in regards to masks:

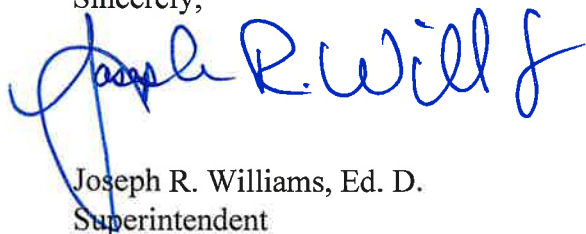
Masks in a congregate setting are one of many recommended mitigations that help prevent the spread of COVID when risk levels are Substantial. Masks are less effective when risk levels are Moderate or Minimal and other mitigations can continue to be employed.

We anticipate that transmission levels will continue to trend toward Moderate or Minimal levels of risk, and we anticipate shifting our Mitigation Plan to Recommend Masking when transmission levels are Moderate and social distancing cannot be maintained. Masks will not be required when we initiate the next phase of un-layering, and we will monitor the data within our schools to evaluate the actual impact that Optional Masking has on our Attendance Rates and Number of Positive Cases. We will be prepared to share our plan on or before February 23rd, 2022.

As you already know, we are awaiting a decision from an Appellate Court so that we understand the legal restrictions or permissions that we are dealing with. I anticipate that decision will be shared today or tomorrow at the latest. The outcome of the decision will impact our timing but not our process. The Governor, who has up to this point proceeded with a series of Executive Orders, has indicated that he intended to remove the mandates in the coming weeks, and the decision of the Appellate Court may just advance the timeline. We are prepared to move forward responsibly and thoughtfully. The safety of our students and our faculty remain our highest priority, and that will not change.

We have all been through quite a bit together over the past two years, and it appears that we are nearing the next phase of our journey as we seek a return to normalcy. We have encountered uncertainty upon uncertainty together, and we have managed to remain together. I believe that our conduct as a community has set a responsible example for others to follow, and I am confident that we will see this through to the end. I will be scheduling a series of Parent Information Sessions as we move ahead. Please feel free to contact me directly if you have questions, concerns or insights to share prior to the release of our plan for next steps.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Joseph R. Williams". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized initial "J".

Joseph R. Williams, Ed. D.
Superintendent