

December 8, 2020

Dear WISD families,

As we all continue to grapple with the COVID-19 pandemic, our Washtenaw community still sees sustained elevated numbers of positive COVID-19 cases and increased hospitalizations at Michigan Medicine and St. Joseph Mercy Health System. Loved ones in our community – parents, children, grandparents, siblings, aunts, uncles, and friends – are fighting COVID-19, and each day, more and more people are confirmed positive.

At Washtenaw ISD, we take tremendous pride in educating and serving our students, children, families, and community. The decisions of providing face-to-face, hybrid or remote instruction and services weigh heavily on our district's leadership and our Board of Education. The stark reality is that local cases have not been decreasing with time and an increasing percentage of children ages 0-17 are now contracting COVID-19. We firmly believe that children are our future, and how COVID-19 is impacting them is alarming.

It is with great difficulty that we have decided to conduct all instruction and services for our WISD student programs and our early childhood programs 100% remotely through the December holidays. We will reassess the impact of COVID-19 in our community with the Washtenaw County Health Department, our WISD Instructional Governance Committee of program staff, and our WISD Program Supervisors as soon as we return from winter break the week of January 4, 2021, and we will bring a recommendation to our Board of Education for next steps on January 12, 2021. In-person instruction will return no earlier than January 19, 2021, but please note that if our community health metrics and other key points on our [WISD Decision-Making Matrix](#) do not improve, we may continue with virtual instruction for a longer period of time.

We know that maintaining a fully virtual environment is challenging for everyone, but we also recognize that hybrid and face-to-face instruction both increase opportunities for spreading COVID-19 among students, families and staff. Our students are missing important socialization experiences. It makes connecting with each other socially even harder, especially during colder winter months. We hear the stories of challenges our families are facing, and these decisions keep us up at night because we know these tough calls directly affect everyone's day-to-day lives in very real ways.

We also understand our schools play an important role in preventing additional cases that could result in further overwhelming our health department and hospital systems already operating at or near capacity. As we knew in the spring when COVID-19 first swept through our community, our schools have a critical, yet difficult, part to play in slowing the spread to help our frontline healthcare workers. These are difficult decisions of life and death that we, as school leaders, never imagined having to make.



Washtenaw ISD

A REGIONAL EDUCATIONAL SERVICE AGENCY

On a brighter note, we know the pandemic will end one day thanks to rapid advancements in the vaccine's research. Although we do not know when, we do know the promise of a vaccine will allow us to eventually return to something that resembles "normal," which will include face-to-face school. School districts across Washtenaw County will be cooperating with the Washtenaw County Health Department to provide vaccination sites.

We ask our community to have hope and help us slow the spread of COVID-19 so we can resume in-person learning in January. We want nothing more than to see our students and families again. We all long to hear laughter and joy. We know everyone is tired, but there is hope in the near future. If we wear our face coverings, maintain physical distancing, practice good hygiene habits, monitor ourselves for any symptoms, and cooperate with any case investigation and contact tracing, we can reduce the alarming spread in our communities and return to in-person instruction.

If you have any questions, comments or concerns, please reach out to us using [Let's Talk](#) or watch for a family survey after the winter break.

Please take good care. We want to see *all* of you in the new year.

Naomi Norman
Interim Superintendent