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November 13, 2020

Good afternoon DPS Families,

Last night, the Dickinson Press published an article that requires some clarification. I am sure it stirred some emotions for many of you; excitement, dread, perhaps confusion. Regardless of if you read it or not, I want to address all of you about where we are today with returning to school full-time.

The conversation about returning students to full-time face-to-face instruction occurs regularly. We want to return kids to school as soon as we can. As soon as we can means being responsible when we do that. We are continually having conversations with state officials, community members, and our local health officials about when would be a good time to come back face-to-face. At one point in time, we did begin talking about an opportunity to provide a pilot to bring kids back before the end of 2020. Unfortunately, due to the rising cases in our community and the strain it places on our staff, it is not the direction we want to take at this time.

We want your kids back, but we need to be wise with that decision. Returning face-to-face would require significant changes to district operations, and the ability to social distance would be impossible. With Stark County being on the verge of red, this is a challenge. The hybrid model isn't perfect, but we know a drastic decision one way or the other can have some serious ramifications. When the decision is made to return to full-time face-to-face learning, we will make sure our families and staff have time to prepare for the transition.

At the last school board meeting, Jill Healy from Trial Runners made a presentation to the school board about providing statistical data to the district. This information is simply another tool to assist the board in making the best decision possible for our staff and students. We must look at the whole picture, which involves many pieces. We will be surveying our students, staff, and families in the future to understand better where everyone is at on this matter as well.

Hopefully, this helps clear up any confusion created in our community. At the next board meeting, we will be visiting about the path forward to face-to-face instruction and what we as a community will need to get there.

We are working diligently to find the best path forward, and I ask for your grace during this process. We know the significant challenges and strain this has had on our families, and we are trying everything we can to safely return students to school. As things evolve, we will continue to keep you all updated.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Shon Hocker'.

Dr. Shon Hocker