



March 5, 2021

Dear Parents and Guardians:

Nearly one year ago, the state put our schools and communities “on pause” in an effort to minimize the spread of the COVID-19 virus. Twelve months later, our schools remain in the hybrid/remote delivery model. This week I sent a letter to Governor Andrew Cuomo on behalf of the district and Board of Education and copied our legislative leaders and local legislators. In the letter I urged the governor to revise the guidance for schools in order to allow us to provide more in-person instruction [the full letter is included at the end of this letter]. In order to do this, we need the state to move from the six-foot distancing guideline, and it is my sincere hope that this happens very soon. The district is working on potential instructional options, and we are making sure we are ready to move forward once the guidance is revised.

You may have read of other areas in the state making changes to their instructional delivery. We have been in regular contact with the county, district legal counsel, as well as state organizations, to see what can be done according to current state guidance. The Board of Education affirmed at the March 4 meeting that while they understand the importance of more in-person instruction for our students, the district must adhere to state guidance. We will continue to advocate at the state level for more in-person days of instruction while preserving the option for parents to have students on remote learning. We want our schools to be safe and fully open as soon as possible.

Here are a couple of additional items of information:

K-6 Special Area Instruction

Since the beginning of the year our music, art, and library teachers in the K-6 buildings have been traveling to classrooms to instruct students. Beginning March 11, our students will be traveling to our special area teachers’ rooms as they have in prior years. In doing so, special area instruction will be more effective for students, since teachers will have full access to their materials and won’t be limited to projects and instruction “on the go.” As part of this reinstated practice, teachers will be sanitizing desks between student usage to ensure we maintain a safe learning environment for our students. All required distancing and masking protocols still apply. If you have questions, please contact your school’s main office.

Winter/Fall 2 Sports

This week area schools also began what’s known as the Fall 2 Sports Season, meaning the start of sports postponed from last fall. We are so happy to see these sports begin. Please note that the shortened winter season is wrapping up this weekend, so there has been some overlap between the two seasons. This has caused practice times that are not necessarily consistent from day to day or week to week. We appreciate your understanding as we work to fit sports seasons into a shortened timeframe to ensure all who wish can participate. We congratulate all winter athletes for working so hard during their abbreviated season and for maintaining safety requirements. Great job, Blue! The district will also be updating procedures for outdoor sports. If you have questions, contact the Athletic Office at (607) 739-5601, x4254.

We ask that you continue the safety measures we’ve been practicing for the last year: avoid unnecessary outings and gatherings, wear masks when out, and wash hands frequently and thoroughly. We can see the light at the end of this tunnel, and we must continue to be vigilant in order to get there.

A year since this pandemic began, I know I speak for the Board of Education and the entire district when I say thank you. Thank you for your hard work and support of our children. Thank you for sharing your thoughts and concerns. Thank you for helping us all to be safe so that we can get through this difficult time.

Sincerely,

Dr. Thomas J. Douglas, Superintendent of Schools

continued



Horseheads Central School District

Dr. Thomas J. Douglas

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March 4, 2021

The Honorable Andrew M. Cuomo
Governor of New York State
NYS State Capitol Building
Albany, NY 12224

Dear Governor Cuomo:

The Horseheads Central School District believes that students need to be back in school five days a week. In order to accomplish this crucial return to in-person instruction in a safe and reasonable manner and in accordance with state health and education department guidelines, districts need revised metrics to allow schools flexibility on social distancing requirements. The mandates regarding six-foot social distancing to de-densify schools and classrooms must be reduced so our children may return to full in-person learning five days a week. This is especially the case for large school districts, as most are unable to meet current distancing requirements and increase the number of students in our schools and classrooms. This one factor is the primary obstacle preventing most schools from fully opening.

With the recent allowance of play for all high-risk sports, our communities are understandably perplexed about why high-risk activities are acceptable, yet a return to full-time in-school instruction is not. If students can wrestle, play basketball, football, etc., why can't students attend school with a reduction in the social distancing requirement?

Data continue to show students are safely participating in activities that involve spacing less than six feet. [See [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(20\)31142-9/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(20)31142-9/fulltext) for a study on distancing, masks, and eye protection.] Our transmission rate has significantly decreased since September. Therefore, our district, like so many others, is advocating for a common set of data-driven metrics that will identify when it is appropriate to fully reopen schools for in-person learning five days a week. Since the onset of COVID-19, we have seen varying metrics used to close down our schools. We are simply asking for updated metrics from the NYS Department of Health to allow the full reopening process to occur as soon as possible.

We understand the frustration many parents and students are feeling and are committed to working with them towards the goal of fully reopening schools. It is our sincere hope that you, as the sole decision maker in New York, and the Department of Health will consider a more equitable approach in adjusting the density requirements that are prohibiting full in-person learning to occur. Our students need more connection, instruction, and interaction. Our school communities need to see that there is a light at the end of this pandemic tunnel.

Thank you for considering this much needed guidance update to return our students to full week in-person instruction safely. We look for the calm, steady, and data-supported guidance that will maintain safe school environments. Again, thank you for your leadership during these challenging times. We know it has been demanding on your time and energy.

Respectfully,

Dr. Thomas J. Douglas
Superintendent of Schools

New York State Governor Andrew Cuomo

New York State Senate Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins

New York State Assembly Leader Carl Heastie

New York State Commissioner of Health Dr. Howard A. Zucker

New State Senate Minority Leader Robert Ort

New York State Senator Thomas O'Mara

New York State Assemblyman - Deputy Minority Leader Philip Palmesano

New York State Assemblyman Christopher Friend

Chemung County Executive Christopher Moss

Chemung County Commissioner of Public Health Peter Buzzetti