



SCHOOL CITY OF HOBART

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"Building College and Career Ready Brickies"

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Dear School City of Hobart Families,

August 3, 2020

The School City of Hobart (SCOH) has been in constant communication with medical professionals at the Lake County Board of Health (LCBH), the Indiana State Department of Health (ISDH), as well as monitoring the CDC and other research entities on the coronavirus. We receive guidance regarding the status of coronavirus activity and community transmission in making decisions regarding the safest model for reopening schools.

While reentry plan development by most school districts knew the possibility existed of a school closure and online learning, thresholds for opening and moving to online were still not firmly established. Now, the current thresholds for consideration by the CDC, as well as other county boards of health in Indiana and the United States, recommend a 5% or less positivity rate for opening. We now sit with Lake County's current positivity rate at 11.8% with a 7-day rolling average of 8% (7/24), and the CDC reports 6-10% for the entire state. This data changes daily with society doing summer activities that promote transmission if precautions are not taken.

On Friday, July 31st, the Lake County Board of Health put out recommendations solidifying their position on opening schools with thresholds set for positivity rates. Additionally, research continues to evolve on the infectious rates for children aged 10-19 indicating that it is similar to infection rates for adults 20-49. The latest *JAMA Pediatrics* study suggest that babies and young children carry high viral loads of SARS-CoV-2. While information has been studied daily utilizing research organizations, the CDC, LCBH, and ISDH in following the safety measures that would allow the opening of schools, the data indicates it is not acceptable at this time, even with the most diligent preparation that SCOH has done. **With transmission high, it is inevitable that COVID-19 will enter our schools.** How much is acceptable? How long before we close because of quarantine and isolation due to transmission? We cannot think that everything is fine when positivity rates and transmission with this pandemic are high. The goal to open school with these positivity rates, no matter how prepared we are to open, would be in conflict of the metrics set for positivity rates and the recommendations of experts.

We have held on to this desire to open schools for as long as we can. Without further delay, I will recommend to the Board of School Trustees at a meeting on August 6th, that all students participate in an E-Learning environment from the first day of school on August 12th continuing through October 9th. Career and Technical Ed will be allowed in small groups. Extra-curricular programs are being monitored and are under review by the SCOH. Their professional organizations have been contacted requesting schedule changes for these activities to take place during a safer time. During the established E-Learning quarter, we will continue to collaborate with research entities, LCBH and ISDH regarding further recommendations, as well as the CDC.

If the virus spread has an acceptable positivity rate approved by the experts, we will plan a return on October 12th. We will offer two options again: In-person or E-Learning instruction. Prior to October 9th, we will ask parents which option they will be choosing by providing a survey. Parents will not be bound by their previous choice.

Finally, during the week of August 3rd, you are picking up materials to start school, such as the student's Chromebook. We will also provide you with E-Learning protocol, which includes logging into your Chromebook, Daily School Instruction/Class Gradual Release Model, and Technology Help-Login Assistance for ease of starting school as smoothly as possible. This is on our website at www.hobart.k12.in.us/elearning. Establishing regular school day schedules and routines will be important now and for the return of school. We must follow the instructional minutes required by the Indiana Department of Education without reduced time and an altered schedule as we did last spring. The school and regular class schedules must be followed during E-Learning. We have separated our instruction into the Gradual Release Model, which allows for breaking up the online time to do school work. Teacher Do (lesson taught)! Class Do (guided practice time)! Student Do (independent work)!

While I know there is unhappiness surrounding this recommendation, the COVID-19 pandemic proves repeatedly that normalcy is hard to achieve as the experts learn, grow, and change their positions often. Think, in such a short amount of time, how much the information and recommendations have changed. All we can do is make the adjustments and move forward as responsibly as we can. We want our families and community to be well. We cannot wish COVID-19 away. It is up to each one of us to control community spread. The 3 W's: Wear a mask! Wash your hands! Watch your distance! will help us! Thank you for your ongoing support and partnership. We will all need patience as we start the first few days of school. Let's BrickieUP! We can do this together!

Dr. Peggy Buffington, Superintendent of Schools

The School City of Hobart does not discriminate on the basis of race, creed, sex, color, national origin, religion, age, sexual orientation, marital status, genetic information, or disability, including limited English proficiency.