



August 28, 2020

PCS Families,

As we get one of the most challenging school years we have ever experienced underway, I'd like to share some thoughts. We stated in our reopening plan that we are committed to listening, being flexible and evolving our plans. We've received feedback from parents, students, and teachers throughout our first week. Our teams are continuously assessing the issues, identifying areas of improvement, and working to implement solutions. So I will take a moment to provide some updates.

Health & Safety

I have been extremely pleased and impressed with our students' and staff's commitment to health and safety. They have taken on the responsibility of wearing masks, appropriately distancing, following new guidelines, and working together in an effort to keep our schools safe and open. Parents, we appreciated your support on this issue. The staggered schedule has helped us transition in a year when everyone in the building is learning new protocols and adjusting to change.

Transportation

Self-Transport: We asked families to consider providing their own transportation, and we appreciate those who have been able to do so. Please continue to self-transport your students as much as possible as this has helped us keep our numbers of bus riders low and allowed for appropriate distancing on our buses.

Schedules: Although we had general estimates of the numbers of students who would be utilizing bus services, this week has allowed us to gather data on the actual numbers and locations of bus riders. We realize that some buses were arriving much earlier than the published schedules, but the number of riders has changed and affected some pick up and drop off times. We now have a better idea of our numbers so we will adjust as best as we can. Please understand that the bus schedules we create can be affected by a number of factors, and there is a high degree of probability that schedules may not be as accurate as in previous years.

Blended students: We made it clear in our original plan that transportation would not be provided for blended students (remote students who have chosen to attend a class(es) on school campus). We did commit to evaluating the possibility of allowing those blended students who have a 1st period or 7th period class to receive bus services. After reviewing transportation data from the first week of school, PHS and PPMS principals were informed that bus transportation would be an option for first and last period blended students. Those principals are working with individual requests to adjust transportation plans.

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Internet Access

We have provided more devices and are utilizing more digital content during this school year than ever before. This impacts infrastructure, and our team planned for the changes as much as possible prior to the start of school.

Pelham High School: Once students were in the building and utilizing the technology, internet accessibility issues were identified. Our technology team worked as quickly as possible to fix the problem, and additional upgrades have been installed with a replacement switch and six additional wireless access points.

Edgenuity Service Disruption

Edgenuity experienced service disruption issues across the platform on two days this week (Monday, 8/24, and Wednesday, 8/26). On both occasions, support calls to Edgenuity were immediately logged, and we were informed that they were working on a fix. These are issues out of our control, and all remote, blended, and traditional students using the platform were affected by the disruptions. As with any online service provider, there are times when technical difficulties affect the availability of the platform. We do not expect this to be an ongoing issue.

Edgenuity Curriculum Design

I want to give some background on the selection of Edgenuity. We have been using Edgenuity in our Pathways program for several years, and we've had many students utilize the curriculum and work in a remote environment successfully. It has always performed well for us and served our needs. We also felt the content adaptability of Edgenuity was superior to the content being provided at the state level. With that being said, we are now utilizing far more course content with a much broader range of students than ever before. In listening to feedback from teachers, students, and parents, we have identified that there are some pacing and rigor issues that might overwhelm some of our students. Please know we are spending much time on adjusting courses and content where appropriate. This will be a continuous process as content changes throughout the year. We ask that students and parents please provide communication and feedback to your teachers when these problems arise. Our teachers will stay in contact with administration and our curriculum team to solve problems and do what is best for our students as we progress through the school year.

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Traditional Students Using Online Platforms While at School

Some have asked why teachers are using the online educational platforms in the traditional classroom setting. We modified our plans to use the online platforms for students of all learning options due to staggered schedule and the ongoing possibility of multiple students and/or teachers moving in and out of quarantine situations. By providing the digital content for our teachers to use as a framework for all students, it provides a consistent educational experience that is adaptable to many circumstances that we may encounter during the pandemic. However, it was never intended to be the substitute for a teacher teaching in the classroom for traditional students. Initially, teachers are having to spend time familiarizing themselves with the digital platforms and curriculum, helping students access the content and resources, and developing teaching methods and plans differently than they have in the past. Going forward, it is our expectation that teachers teach and enhance the lesson of the provided resources, whether that is a textbook or digital content. We will continue to monitor the impact of providing the digital curriculum for all students. As we move forward, parents should communicate any ongoing concerns with the teacher and the principal.

Teacher Availability for Remote Learners in Middle & High School

This is an issue that we are discussing within our team, especially as we sort out the time requirement related to Edgenuity for both students and teachers. At this time, teachers are available via email and are hosting weekly Google Meets. We are evaluating current practices to determine if there are needs for expanded availability.

iReady Assessment and Content Availability After School Hours

We are aware of the concerns regarding the iReady diagnostic shutting off at 3:30 pm each day. We understand the possible impact this may have on remote learners who need to test later. Therefore, we will extend the time for testers until 9:00 pm for the week of 9/7-9/11.

Additionally, there are a few other elementary resources that shut off at 3:30 pm. We've asked our teachers to utilize different resources to allow for learning at later hours.

In Closing

This school year is going to present us with challenges and strenuous circumstances. Our patience and determination will be tested, but we will work together to make the best of a very difficult situation. I am personally blessed to work everyday with such a talented and hard working group of educators and to be in a community that is so supportive of our schools. Moving forward, let's please communicate and work through appropriate channels to resolve concerns. Problems get resolved and trust is built when we give our teachers and administrators an opportunity to hear and correct issues.

As a final note, the Pelham Board of Education will be meeting on Monday, August 31 at 6:30 pm. We will provide budget and COVID updates, and the meeting will be live streamed for those who want to tune in. You can access the livestream through this link - <https://youtu.be/zP4pcvcl3Vo>.

Be safe and stay well,

Dr. Scott Coefield
Superintendent
Pelham City Schools