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August 11, 2020

Welcome Back Bridgeport Public Schools!

I am excited to welcome back our students, staff, and families for the 2020-21 school year. This year, we will be opening schools during an unprecedented time in our community. There are many discussions happening around whether schools should open and if parents should send their children to school. I respect and support every parent's decision to send their child to in person class or to remain on a remote learning plan. I want every parent to feel respected for their own decision. Parents should not be coerced to keep their children at home if they feel it is safe to send them to school, or be pressured to send them to school if they feel it is going to put them at risk.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the harms attributed to closed schools on the social, emotional, behavioral health, economic well-being, and academic achievement of children, in both the short- and long-term, are well-known and significant. It is well documented that the lack of in-person educational options disproportionately harms low-income and minority children and those with special needs. These student groups make up a significant percentage of our students in the Bridgeport Public Schools. Bridgeport students do not have access to many of the resources that other students in more affluent communities around Bridgeport have access to. Many students lack their own device to access remote learning and need to rely on the district to provide them with an adequate device. There are students who do not have reliable internet connectivity even when a device is accessible. Bridgeport students don't have private tutors to support online instruction. Our students rely on school-supported resources, such as meal programs, special education services, counseling and social emotional supports, and after-school programs to help foster positive growth and development.

No other setting outside of a child's home has more influence on a child's health and well-being than the school they attend. These are just some of the examples of the ways that the in-person school environment impacts our children:

- provides educational instruction;
- supports the development of social and emotional skills;
- creates a safe environment for learning;
- addresses nutritional needs; and
- facilitates physical activity.

Schools also provide critical services that help meet the needs of children and families. In Bridgeport, schools provide all students with a supporting environment that promotes the development of social and emotional skills. We create a safe

environment for students to learn and grow both academically and emotionally. Our staff plays a critical role in identifying and addressing neglect and abuse. Our Food and Nutrition program fulfills the essential nutritional needs of thousands of children across the community. Schools facilitate and support much needed physical activity.

School closure disrupts the delivery of essential in-person instruction and critical services to children and families, which has negative effects on children both short and long term. Reopening schools creates an opportunity to invest in the education, well-being, and future of one of our greatest assets which is our children. I believe wholeheartedly that we can safely accomplish reopening our schools while taking every precaution to protect students, teachers, staff, and families.

Sincerely,

Michael J. Testani
Superintendent of Schools