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## Taylorville Community Unit School District #3

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August 5, 2020

Taylorville CUSD#3 families,

The District has made the difficult decision to revise our initial plans and begin school in Fall 2020 in a **modified remote learning model for all students**. Please note the following details:

- All students will begin the school year in remote learning.
- The first day of student remote attendance will be Wednesday, August 19, 2020
- This initial remote period will tentatively be reviewed quarterly, with the first review conducted in the fall, continuing indefinitely until conditions dictate it is safe to return.
- All teachers able will teach from school classrooms with full access to teaching resources and technology.
- A task force comprising members of District administration and staff is working to craft plans for small groups to rotate in for limited in-person experiences throughout the remote period.
- Small groups will be limited in number and will prioritize students with special service needs. Details on small-group opportunities will be forthcoming.
- Conditions will be continually evaluated for the possibility of increased in-person experiences.

We understand that this decision will cause substantial disruption to the lives of many, and that reality is painful to all involved. Unfortunately, the reality we are facing is one of life and death.

After holding clarifying conversations with the district COVID-19 Transition Committee, other school districts, and our own teachers' and support staff unions, we reached the indelible conclusion that the risk of potentially lethal transmission within schools was too high—in fact, it was virtually inevitable. Given ongoing confusion with health guidelines, unsolvable challenges in tackling the complexity of this issue, and continued holdups in the supply chain for PPE and other safety implements, we simply cannot ask our students, staff members, or their families to put themselves into a situation of such imminent danger.

As evidenced by the shift to remote learning announced by nearly every other comparable district, schools have been tasked with doing the impossible. An honest evaluation of what is possible under these circumstances leads to no other conclusion.

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### TAYLORVILLE SCHOOLS ARE A+

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## Background

We've relied on state and federal public health and education agencies for guidance on how we can and must provide for the health and safety of students and staff. From the onset, this guidance contained information that in many ways appeared contradictory and conflicting. Over time, these contradictions have not been resolved, only intensified, and we have continued to receive conflicting answers on vital safety questions on different days and from different sources.

This is not point the finger at these agencies, who are doing their best with incomplete information, as are we all. It has simply become clear in recent days that there is too much unknown about this highly contagious, deadly virus to have full confidence in any safety precautions. After analyzing the selections made by our families and evaluating several potential changes to our initial plan, too many unacceptable safety considerations remain. Ultimately, the buck stops at the local level when it comes to providing for the health and safety of our staff and families. Thus, we must act decisively to move in this direction.

Please know that this decision was not made lightly. Every stone has been overturned during this process, including a proposal to evolve our initial plans to extend hybrid learning roles to reduce class sizes. Unfortunately, even these changes, which would have had detrimental effects on the quality of education for all students, would have been insufficient to bring us to an acceptable level of compliance with health guidelines.

As a district, we take heart that our efforts have *not failed* to produce a plan that created the best possible scenarios under current conditions. Unfortunately, it is now clear that the *best possible* is simply not *good enough* when it comes to safety.

In addition, we faced a strong likelihood of being forced to shift to remote learning within a few weeks of the start of school. Due to the multiple structures set up in our initial plan, such a shift would have led to greater inequities between different learning groups than having all students start in remote learning. As a community, we can all take heart in the knowledge that our remote learning plan is strong and will provide students with instruction that is carefully planned, based in best practices, and in alignment with learning standards for all students.

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## **Remote Learning Plan 2.0**

Our Remote Learning Plan continues to undergo significant revisions and improvements since it was implemented during the mandatory closure of schools last spring. This 2.0 plan addresses many inadequacies that were experienced last year.

- Attendance and grading procedures will follow traditional practices.
- Teachers will be available for the duration of the regularly scheduled school day.
- Students will engage in instruction with teachers.
- Students will receive 5 hours of learning activities daily, including specials.
- Plans continue to connecting students with technology safely and will be communicated.
- More information will come to families from schools and individual teachers once the sectioning process has been completed.

## **Special Services**

All amended remote learning Individualized Education Plans (IEP) will remain in effect. Priority for small-group, in-person learning opportunities will be given to students with special service needs. Individual families will receive communications from case managers regarding these possibilities.

Special Services teams are dedicated to amplifying meaningful learning experiences through remote instruction as evidenced by:

1. Consistent learning opportunities that address students' individualized goals/needs.
2. Establishing a system and protocol that will provide small group opportunities for in-person instruction as possible.
3. Careful considerations for students along the continuum, beginning with students presenting with the most significant needs.

## **Tommy TV/Website**

We understand that many families will have questions regarding this change. We are compiling a review and will post it to our Tommy TV U-Tube channel and district website.

Thank you for your continued patience and understanding during these volatile times. This decision was not what any of us had hoped for, and we will continue to move forward in providing the best possible education under these new circumstances.

Sincerely,

Taylorville CUSD#3 School District

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