



PALMERTON AREA SCHOOL DISTRICT

CENTRAL ADMINISTRATION OFFICE

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Dear Parents:

Many of you have heard that the Pennsylvania Department of Education has issued preliminary guidance for the opening of schools and is promising more specific guidance over the next three weeks. The Department is requiring each school entity to develop, obtain School Board approval of, and post publicly a detailed Health and Safety Plan prior to opening schools. We want you to know that we are already working vigilantly to develop a plan in compliance with this guidance that will allow our schools to open as safely as possible.

The preliminary guidance also suggests that schools “may want to consider piloting approaches [to reopening] on a smaller scale to inform broader implementation in the fall” and that “such activities may begin as early as July 1, 2020.” Many of our families of children with disabilities have seized on this language to inquire about opening schools by July 1 to provide “extended school year” (“ESY”) services for their children who qualify for such services. We appreciate how eager families are to end virtual learning and return to in-person instruction. For several reasons, we cannot open an in-person ESY program this summer.

First, development and approval of a detailed Health and Safety Plan will require careful thought and engagement with experts at a time when promised additional guidance from the Department is not yet available.

Second, implementing such a plan will require staff training, school and transportation preparation, and resource acquisition, all in a relatively short timeframe.

Third, shifting at this point from planned virtual ESY instruction to in-school ESY will require a commitment of teachers, paraprofessional, and transportation staff at the last minute and well after we have already committed staff for virtual learning. We anticipate that many personnel who had committed to virtual instruction will be unwilling or unavailable for instruction in school settings.

Fourth, and most important, we are unwilling to conduct a “pilot” with our most vulnerable learners based on a hastily-developed plan completed without the benefit of the additional guidance the Department has yet to offer.

We realize the frustration that many of you will feel at this decision. As we continue with virtual programming for the summer, we ask for your patience and trust. Our foremost goal is to ensure that our students—your children—return to school in just a very short while in a safe, supportive, and orderly manner.

Respectfully,

Suzanne Rentschler

Director of Special Education

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