



Carlisle Area School District
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Christina M. Spielbauer • Superintendent

Dear Carlisle Area School District Families, Staff, and Community:

As stated in the July update to the Board of Directors, the District administration indicated that we would announce the plan to start the school year by the end of this month. Unfortunately, these past several weeks have not provided the clarity and direction which we would have needed to make a firm and committed decision for the school to start on August 24, 2020.

As a result, the Carlisle Area School District administration will recommend to the Board of Directors a delay to the start of the school year until Tuesday, September 8, 2020. As we monitor the COVID-19 situation in the coming days and weeks, we are striving to open in a Tier 2 (hybrid) model that allows for two days for in-person school attendance. However, we must urge our families and staff to *be prepared* for the possibility of a Tier 1 (fully online) reopening on September 8, 2020.

This decision to delay has been painstaking as it has been our sincere intention to provide our families and staff with a clear pathway forward. As with other school districts in our area, the health and safety of our students and staff are our absolute priority. We simply cannot in good conscience open our doors to students as originally scheduled.

We want to be transparent about the top issues which are impacting this decision:

- Recent comments by our state's elected and public health leaders point to increasing uncertainty about reopening schools. Similarly, as neighboring states and counties experience increasing COVID cases – as we are – an increasing number of school districts have already decided to begin the 2020-21 school year with online learning. Given these trends and patterns, we are highly concerned that either the Governor will close school to in-person learning, or that the District will be forced to do so at the local level.
- We are concerned about the increasing number of COVID cases in our county. The District has consulted with local medical experts who also indicate that turn-around time for COVID testing is upwards of two weeks. This delays our ability to conduct contact tracing, and inhibits our ability to make timely and informed decisions (such as quarantining and the closing of classrooms and/or buildings).
- Our recent family survey – along with a high volume of phone calls and emails – make it apparent that a large proportion of our families are highly anxious about their children returning to school and the recommended health and safety procedures. This is understandable, and we share those concerns. We have conducted deep and comprehensive studies of our classrooms, buildings, and buses. While we would take every possible measure to ensure the health and safety of our students and staff, we recognize our limitations. We cannot *guarantee* CDC-recommended safety precautions to include social distancing on every bus, 6-foot separation in every classroom, or appropriate conduct – to include wearing a mask when social distancing is not possible – from every student. Given increases in cases within the community, this remains a significant factor for us as we make a decision on reopening.

- We must also be responsive to the health conditions and concerns of our staff. We have now determined that a significant number of Carlisle faculty and staff would be unable to return to the classroom. On top of the concern for our staff members, the need to fill vacant classrooms yields an incredible operational challenge. Due to the statewide teacher shortage, the pool of available teachers and staff is lacking. In addition, absences created by inevitable sick days or the quarantining of staff would burden an already strained substitute pool. We need to be able to appropriately staff our classrooms and serve our students.
- We believe that it will be inevitable that individual classrooms, wings, or schools close down for several days at a time due to COVID outbreaks among students and staff. Already this summer, sports teams in our region have begun practices only to be shut down due to COVID cases. School buildings represent the most significant gatherings of people in our communities. When COVID cases arise, shifting back and forth between in-person and online instruction places a significant burden on students, staff, and families.

These decisions have been among the most challenging that I have faced as a superintendent. There are few clear or right answers, and I recognize the challenges which our families and our staff will encounter. But at this moment in time, I feel that presenting a concrete decision would be misleading and inappropriate given our turbulent and ever-changing situation.

Next week, we will provide our revised calendar and you will be notified whether your student has been assigned an “A” or “B” schedule.

If you would like to pursue the District’s Carlisle Virtual Academy (CVA) for fully online instruction throughout the year, [please click here for more information.](#)

Thank you for your continued support.

Christina Spielbauer
Superintendent