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To our Cougar Families,

Like all of our students, faculty, and staff, I was extremely devastated when Central received the news that the Clinton County Health Department was encouraging districts to delay the start of school. We have spent countless hours preparing for our students to return and we miss them dearly. Teachers, staff, and administration planned all summer thinking that we would FINALLY get to see our kids again on Monday, August 17th.

Unfortunately, that was not the hand we were dealt. So now, for the next two weeks, we have a new mission. That mission is for our school to be as prepared as humanly possible for any circumstance that we may encounter. Over the next 10 days, our faculty will be engaging in rigorous professional development activities. This training will not only help teachers be more effective in a face-to-face setting, it will also improve their ability to better engage students in a multitude of learning formats.

The next couple of weeks will also give us the benefit of "time." Time to examine the practices of other districts in our region (who were able to have students return) and learn from their successes and failures while managing this complex environment. Additionally, the two-week delay to begin the school year will be added to the end of our school calendar. So, not only will our teachers be more prepared to handle whatever is thrown at them, we will also maximize our total amount of in-person instruction for students throughout the school term. We will still be teaching and learning for the same number of school days... we simply moved the year back a couple weeks to capture the maximum amount of time spent "in-person" this school year.

As an example, if we would have quickly jumped to 25% or 50% student capacity for the next few days, or transitioned to a fully remote learning environment, then we would essentially be "trading" those days for what I sincerely believe will be full, back to normal, school days at the end of May. Since we know that in-person learning is BY FAR the most beneficial style of learning, we simply did not think it would be in the best interest of students to make that trade at this time.

One burning question has been, what will school look like on August 31st and will Central be going to online classes? **It is 100% our intention to bring our students back to in-person learning when school resumes.**

With that being said, we will be analyzing multiple data points as we work through our decision making process. These data points are what I consider to be our "guardrails" and they will be followed until the time we decide locally they need to be adjusted.

Central Community High School will look at the following county level metrics when making decisions:

1. Positivity rate over 8%
 - a. Clinton County is currently at an 8.6% positivity rate. (Warning)
2. New cases per 100,000 - Target is less than 50 per 100,000
 - a. Clinton County is currently at 183 per 100,000. (Warning)

Link to metrics: <https://www.dph.illinois.gov/countymetrics?county=Clinton>

When these two metrics hit “warning” levels, it is obviously concerning for our community. As you may have seen, Clinton County was designated as a COVID-19 “Hot Spot” on Friday, August 14th. The county level metrics are updated every Friday, and I will closely monitor them each week.

Although the ongoing situation in the county is concerning, **Central High School will not be relying solely on the Clinton County COVID-19 metrics to make academic decisions for our students.**

In addition to those metrics, we will take into consideration the number/and or percentage of students and staff in our district that are either on home quarantine or probable COVID-19 positives.

If we have a 10 day average of more than 10% of our students or staff placed into quarantine due to either Covid-Like illness or exposure to an individual who has tested positive for COVID-19, we will be forced to make adjustments to our learning environment. Those adjustments could be any of the following:

1. Reduced student capacity (50% of students in the building at a time)
2. Shortened school day. Classes would be reduced to 40 minutes and our school day would run from 8:03 to 1:00. Lunch would be available to students as they exit.
3. Reduced Student capacity (25% of students in the building at a time)
4. All Classes Taught Online

Obviously, we would make the adjustment based on the severity of the situation. **Please know that we will explore ALL possible options prior to making the decision to go to a full Online Class schedule.**

To give you a better idea of this metric, **10% of our student and staff population would equal 63 students or 5 staff.** Again, this would be an average over the span of 10 school days or roughly two weeks. So for example, a single day with 63 students or 5 teachers out of the building would not automatically trigger an adjustment. It would take multiple days of increased numbers to make that happen.

If the threshold is met and we are forced to make changes to our school day, we will continue to closely analyze the most recent school-wide COVID-19 related data. If we see positive developments, our goal would be to get “back to normal” as quickly as possible.

As you can see in the latest Central High School COVID-19 Status Update (available on our Website under “Cougar News”) there were increases in the total number of our students being placed on quarantine. These students were all exposed to the virus while participating in activities outside of the school. While examining the numbers found in this week’s COVID-19 Status Update, you may also notice that we have not met the 10% threshold (mentioned previously). Therefore, we plan on starting the school year on August 31st at full student capacity. We must also ensure that all ISBE and IDPH guidelines are followed when students return. In a nutshell, students should expect the following when school resumes:

1. Masks must be worn at all times when inside the building.
2. Limit 50 students to any indoor area.
3. 6 ft. social distancing required while eating and not wearing a mask.

The rest of our guidelines can be found in our “Back to School” Plan at www.centralcougars.org

Finally, no matter what we are faced with this school year, I am 100% confident that the faculty and staff at Central will be HIGHLY prepared to deliver quality instruction in ANY learning environment. **To ensure that Central students are equally prepared for any potential change in our teaching methods, we will be implementing Online Learning Days every Wednesday (beginning on Wednesday, September 2nd) until further notice.** Students will not be in attendance for these days and all activities will be completed from home.

Our “Online Learning Days” will have a very specific purpose. These days will allow teachers to give the students a “trial run” in regards to what Online Classes will look like in all of our classrooms.

The format will be as follows:

1. Teachers will clearly explain the expectations for their Online Classes on Tuesday of each week.
2. The students will then have Wednesdays to engage in those pre-planned Online Learning activities.
3. When students then return to campus on Thursday, teachers will be able to give feedback to students about the process and also be available, in-person, to answer any questions students may have about our new Online Learning Policies and Procedures.

Overall, this process will allow Central High School students to be much more successful if we are forced to limit our attendance capacity or, in a worst case scenario, transition to a fully online learning model. It will also help us to identify any student that may need additional technological support in their homes. **Once we feel that all students have the skills and resources to fully engage in their Online Classes, we will discontinue the use of this practice.**

We know this is an uncertain and scary time as a parent and our goal is to be as transparent as possible. As we have all learned, this situation can change extremely quickly and we promise to always communicate our decision-making processes with you. All we ask is that you show us some grace as we work together to get through this. Your support and kindness are infinitely valuable right now. We are all honestly doing the very best we can.

We also understand if you would like to make the personal choice for your child to take all of their classes Online. If you would like to explore this option further, please contact our building principal, Dr. Ketchum, and he would be happy to help you work through that decision.

If you have specific questions about any of this information, please do not hesitate to reach out. We are always here to help.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Dustin R. Foutch". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "D" and a stylized "F".

Dustin R. Foutch

Superintendent