



# PIEDMONT

## Community Charter School

### **Dear Parents, Students, Teachers, Administrators and the Larger School Community**

The Board of Directors for Piedmont Community Charter School wants you all to know that we are inspired by your commitment to the school. We know that there will be difficulties this year that have never existed for each one of you. We want to encourage you that we will get through this with joy and kindness. We believe in your resilience and adaptability. Most of all, we want you know you have been heard and we are listening. We have been receiving feedback on several situations and decisions and we wanted to take some time to address them here. As you start your school year Monday morning, we are diligently working to smooth out the road for a successful year.

### **BOARD MEETING TECHNICAL ISSUES**

First, the sound and streaming issues for the board meetings have been a very real problem. We have not delivered on our responsibility to make sure that parents and students are able to see and follow the board meetings in a coherent way. This situation was not intentional, but it is unacceptable. To remedy this situation the board has instructed the administration to find a solution before the next board meeting. We will commit whatever resources necessary to fix this. This includes hiring professional consultants, buying needed streaming equipment and paying whatever overtime necessary to ensure success. This action is our highest priority because we realize that we have an obligation to you to ensure you can see and hear the meetings, especially in a time when the state is restricting gatherings indoors and the public are unable to attend.

Partly because of these issues there is some lack of clarity about the re-opening plan. We would like to review it here and provide some background reasoning for the phased approach we have chosen. Following this summary, we will address some feedback we have received about the plan and the mid-summer survey.

### **THE REOPENING PLAN**

In approving this plan, the board stated its goal to have as many students as possible receive in-person learning as quickly and safely as possible. We believe the plan developed by the administration addresses that goal. We also recognize that it will place a burden on each constituency of the school. Despite that fact, we believe it offers the most benefit possible for the school as a whole.

**Phase 1: The school year will begin with 2 weeks of all remote learning.**

These two weeks are needed because of four critical factors, two of which are unique to Piedmont.

1. To allow students who have just come back from vacation 14 days of isolation with their families before returning to school. Many families travel the last week before school starts to end the summer. Fourteen days is beyond the incubation period for COVID-19 and will reduce risk in the school once students return.
2. At the time of plan development COVID-19 percentage positive tests were on the rise in Gaston County. The thought at that time was to give a few extra weeks for the spike to wane. As of today, we are seeing that play out. In the last several weeks the percent positive tests have declined. We all hope this will continue as the school year progresses.
3. This year is an expansion year for Piedmont. We will welcome over 500 new students and 40 new staff members. The normal amount of time to onboard all those new to our community and develop and practice new COVID-19 procedures which will be in place at every campus, was not enough. The extra time allows us to be ready to receive students in a professional and organized manner and give our best effort toward maintaining a safe environment for learning.
4. We will institute a hybrid learning environment for the first time. Teachers will be asked to teach in-person and online simultaneously. The two weeks allow teachers to sharpen their online techniques and envision how they can be used in concert with in-person teaching. We believe this will pay dividends as the classrooms transition to hybrid learning.

**Phase 2: At week 3 of the school year in-person non-flexible students will return to class Monday - Thursday. This period will last approximately four weeks and end +/- six weeks into the school year.**

These four weeks are the beginning of a cautious transition to partial in-person learning. The reasoning for this approach is below:

1. Addresses those in the community without the option to have students home long term.
2. Allows teachers to develop and improve COVID-19 procedures and teaching techniques with a small number of students in class.
3. Extends the time of limited exposure for students and teachers, again hoping the spread will decrease with time.

**Phase 3: At approximately the beginning of week 7 a percentage (approximately 50%) of In-person flexible students will return to in-person instruction Monday-Thursday. (Subject to change in Community COVID Status)**

At this point the board and administration will evaluate the effectiveness of the COVID-19 procedures and protocols along with CDC recommendations, state restrictions, COVID active cases in Gaston county, percent positive history in Gaston county and other information available.

If favorable conditions exist, we plan to maximize the capacity of the school buildings and have some In-person flexible students return for in-person instruction. If restrictions and other factors don't change significantly over the next six weeks, the numbers would approximately break down as follows:

- 1/3 of students have chosen remote learning
- 1/3 of students have chosen in-person flexible
- 1/3 of students have chosen in-person not flexible

This is not exact for every grade level, but the numbers are comparable K-12.

The result of this spread means that approximately 1/3 of students will return after two weeks and another +/- 16% (half of the in-person flexible) will return after the six week mark, taking the total number of in-person students to +/- 50%. Under the current state restrictions this is the capacity of the schools. We have evaluated these limits in-person for every campus and are even moving non-essential furniture to storage to make room for students. **The in-person flexible students who return will be chosen by random Lottery. A survey to determine who would like to return will be administered for students in this category before the lottery.**

Again, these numbers are not completely accurate for every grade level as some have space constraints that won't allow the full 50%. Most will and the goal will be to add as many as safely possible.

### **FEEDBACK**

We have received and heard your feedback. Below is some background information and insight into the decisions of the board for common themes in the emails.

#### **A/B Day Cohorts**

Some parents had anticipated that students may be attending two days a week with a Monday-Tuesday group (A) and a Thursday-Friday Group (B). Rotating students throughout the week increases teachers', staff and students' risk by exposing them to more people. Because of this the A/B scheme was rejected.

#### **The Summer Surveys**

Some parents have emailed and suggested that the survey given over the summer failed to fully explain the implications of its results. This statement is true because no one at the time, not the administration or the board, knew what the re-opening plan would be. It simply had not been formulated. The results of the survey were used to inform the plan, not the other way around. The survey was given, received, and evaluated in good faith, considering our mission and four constituencies: students, parents, teachers, and the community. The timing of the governor's announcement of plans A, B or C also had a direct effect on the school's ability to gather and process any additional survey information. The state's announcement was planned and then delayed for several weeks, essentially putting any re-opening planning in limbo. During that time, the administration and staff worked diligently to gather survey results from almost every parent and sort out discrepancies in the base information.

The plan was formulated and acted on by the board in July. Any further delay for any reason would have impacted the school's ability to serve our mission in a responsible way. Since that time, the administration and staff have been feverishly working to implement the plan. Despite their anxiety over the pandemic, the restrictive requirements of the state, and the overwhelming pressure to reopen school while keeping everyone as safe as possible, like always, they are shining.

## **Seniors**

Several parents of seniors have emailed and asked if it is possible for the entire senior class to return to in-person learning. There are two main reasons this is not possible. The first is logistical. There are classes that have more than 50% seniors in them. A classroom can only hold 50% of normal capacity with the current state restrictions. Given those circumstances there is no way to accommodate these classes without adding teachers to each of these subjects. This makes it impractical to pursue.

Every student, in all grades, has the right to be fairly treated by the school. Reserving spots for seniors at the expense of others is ethically questionable and opens a legal risk of inequity for the school. We have consulted our legal counsel and they have recommended against a plan of this nature.

We all know and appreciate that a student's senior year is special in our hearts and minds. All who serve this school want nothing more than an end to this pandemic and a return to in-person learning for all our students.

We have all labored together as the school has matured, from the parents that shuttle their children to school, to those who support our sports and arts programs, to those who raise money and morale through the PTO, to the students who have done their part to show pride in the school and themselves as the school gained nine points in its overall grade in the last three years on a 100 point scale, to the teachers who have inspired those gains, to the administrators who have led that change and the board members who have sacrificed their nights and weekends for years to realize the maturation of this school. We all want the school fully and safely open. Until then, we will do our best to communicate clearly and act responsibly. We hope that you will join us in this difficult year to stand together and work toward our common goals.

## **A LOOK FORWARD**

Beyond the first six weeks there is less certainty about how the school year will unfold. There are many possibilities, all dependent on the course of the pandemic. Though we don't know what will happen below is a list of general scenarios and what might be expected in each.

### **Scenario 1 – The Pandemic Worsens**

If the pandemic worsens significantly there is a possibility that the state will close schools again. In that circumstance, we will return to full remote learning.

### **Scenario 2 – An Active COVID-19 Cluster in the School**

In the event a cluster or even a single case occurs in the school, we must contact the county health department and they will provide guidance that we will follow. This guidance could include days to weeks of shutdown for the school, quarantine of exposed individuals (remote learning) or no change at all. Those recommendations will be made by medical professionals and acted on by the board and administration. The school has procedures in place to contact exposed individuals and communicate protocols for each situation.

### **Scenario 3 – Diminished Percent Positive COVID-19 Testing**

If the pandemic wanes and state restrictions are loosened or removed, the school will respond in coordination with those changes. The key to getting more students in school is the six-foot social distance requirements. If that changes, more than 50% can be accommodated. For at least the Fall semester of 2020, parents will have the option of full remote learning. We will re-evaluate this option going into the Spring semester.

### **Scenario 4 – COVID-19 Cases and Restrictions Stay the Same**

If there are no significant changes in the pandemic or state restrictions, the current plan will likely remain. **We are considering that in-person flex students would switch. Meaning if the student were remote first semester, then they would be in-person second semester if their preference is in-person.** This has not been thoroughly vetted but is currently in consideration and seems the most likely scenario.

Throughout the development of the re-opening plan, the board and administration have focused on the mission and core values of the school. That plan is already being implemented. Teachers have returned to work taking on their important tasks along with new COVID-19 procedures and a new personal risk element to their job. We as a board acknowledge their dedication and pledge to provide the materials and resources to minimize this new risk and support them as they develop new teaching techniques in the hybrid classroom environment. The administrators and other staff have been working overtime, preparing procedures and the physical buildings for re-opening. The board also acknowledges that they have led with introspection and foresight throughout the crisis.



Michael K. Satterfield, President BOD

On behalf of the Board of Directors