ROME CITY SCHOOL DISTRICT
Creating Successful Futures

409 Bell Road ◆ Rome, NY 13440
(315) 338-6521 ◆ Fax: (315) 338-6526

Peter C. Blake
Superintendent of Schools
pblake@romecsd.org

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Dear Families and Staff,

The past several months have been difficult and challenging on our entire community as we learn to navigate and adapt to the new environment that we have been thrown into. As you are aware, school districts throughout the state and country have been working to develop plans that will allow students to return to in-person learning environments, with many adjustments to the traditional model and experiences that we have grown accustomed to over the years. With reopening schools, our options for instruction have been limited to a hybrid model (partial in-person/partial remote) and a full remote model. Understanding that in-person learning experiences are the preferred method of education for our students, we have attempted to meet all requirements that are associated with welcoming students and staff back to our schools.

Unfortunately, the obstacles to providing any form of in-person learning experiences continues to grow exponentially. The experience of opening schools will not be anything similar to what we are used to and the experience of students and staff in the schools will not be similar to what most people envision in their heads. The obstacles that continue to present themselves include, but are not limited to:

- Asymptomatic cases and the lack of ability to detect positive cases in our schools.
- Quarantine and contact tracing requirements, including the burden that the Department of Health requirements will place on a family if someone is suspected of an illness or actually becomes ill.
- Testing requirements and potential cost.
- Lack of clarity on the guidance/requirements (i.e. can we wear masks OR socially distance, or, must it be wearing masks AND socially distance).
- Lack of staff to appropriately and adequately clean facilities while occupied throughout the day and associated costs to ensure this is done correctly.
- Need for additional staffing to properly and fully implement a socially distanced school and associated costs.
- Major conflicts with scheduling students, specifically at the high school and middle school level if students are in-person part-time.
- Transportation continues to be a large concern as we are not currently able to support the capacity needed to transport students who need it, under the social distance requirements.
- Requirements placed on educators and staff to learn the new health and safety requirements, learn a new method of in-person instruction, and continue to learn how to teach remotely. These requirements divide an individual's focus and ability to ensure delivery of any one area with fidelity.
- Unreasonable time frame to ensure that all elements of hybrid or in-person learning can be executed, while maintaining health and safety safeguards.
- Overall health, safety, and welfare maintenance of our students, staff, and community given all of the unknowns.

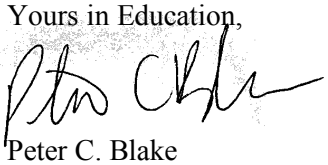
In discussing all of the required elements of reopening our schools for in-person learning experiences with our district and building leaders, reviewing and responding to the ongoing questions from teachers and parents, reviewing the current trends of reopening throughout the country, and in consultation with our Board of Education; the Rome City School District has determined that reopening our schools in September of 2020 must be done through a complete remote model. We know that our schools play an important role in providing stability and safety for our students, families and staff, and we understand that this decision can pose a hardship for families. However, our leadership team believes this decision is in the best interest of our entire community's health, safety and well-being.

As with any model of instruction in the reopening of schools, there will still be challenges and issues that arise with a complete remote learning. We are aware that the experience must be different than what students and families experienced in the Spring of 2020. Our leadership team also recognizes that this topic can be very polarizing within any community, as people have strong opinions, beliefs, and evidence to support any side of this discussion. This decision has not come lightly and while it is not the popular decision, it is the best decision amongst a list of less than perfect options. In the coming weeks, we will be working with our administrators and teachers to both develop schedules and enhance instructional skills so that our students are provided with the most robust educational experience possible. We will also continue the process of ensuring all students have access to electronic devices and the internet so that the barriers to at home learning are minimal.

It is our intent to continue with remote learning through the first six (6) weeks of the 2020-2021 school year, at which point we will either continue this way or begin to reintroduce students back into our facilities. In early October, our same district team will review the current situation in our region and throughout the state/country and decide how learning will look in late October/early November. Again, we understand that all models will present students, families, and staff some form of stress and anxiety; however, remote learning is the only sure way to provide a healthy and safe learning experience.

Over the next few weeks, we will continue to provide our community with updated information and support as we prepare to begin the 2020-2021 school year. The health, safety, and well-being of our students, staff and community will continue to be at the forefront of every decision we make. Our community reopening meetings are one way in which parents can ask their questions. These meetings will be held on Monday, August 17 at 7:00 p.m., Wednesday, August 19 at 2:00 p.m., and Friday, August 19 at 7:00 p.m. and will all be held via Zoom. Also, parents can continue to utilize our reopening email for questions, rcsdreopening@romecsd.org. Please be assured that we are doing everything in our power to continue to provide academic opportunities and minimize disruption to our students, families and staff during this unprecedented situation. As always, thank you for your patience, understanding and flexibility.

Yours in Education,



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