

I've thought about how this column would read for four and a half months since we last had students on March 13, 2020. It has been delayed multiple times because of my concern that what would be submitted would be inaccurate by the time it was published. To say things have changed in a few months is obviously a huge understatement due to the global pandemic of COVID-19. Since April, we have been working on how school would look for the Fall of 2020. Many plans have been discussed, reviewed for practicality and effectiveness and adapted for the changes we have seen. Often, those changes were daily or even hourly. During this time, I have been in regular contact with the Logan County Health Department as we continuously reviewed the conditions locally as well as statewide.

On July 13th our Board of Education approved a set of protocols for how school will open. Those protocols require cooperation between students, parents and the school. For example, it is the responsibility of the parent to not send your child to school if they are exhibiting established signs of COVID-19. We encourage parents to have the discussion with their children about recognizing the symptoms and importance of communication daily. This is to assure the continued health and safety of all students and staff. I know many of you would like clear answers to every scenario but that isn't possible since most actions will be on a case by case basis. In the event a class must quarantine or a building must close, we have contingencies in place to allow a much more effective distance learning opportunity than what was available last spring. We are planning professional development for our teachers as we begin school that will assist them in delivering effective instruction remotely if needed. Teachers will be working with students one day a week to improve their level of understanding of the online learning platforms we have available in the event that distance learning becomes a necessity. During the enrollment process, we have been collecting data on our families and their level of internet connectivity as well as their access to computing devices. We will utilize that data to determine the need for assistance from the district. We received a grant providing internet broadcast points for our school buildings so students could be in the vicinity of one of our buildings and receive internet. Just last week, we also received a grant providing 300 internet hot spots for eligible families who lack internet service. All connections will come with content filtering and the service will be paid by the district. We have also ordered Chromebooks for eligible families who lack a computing device in their home. Eligibility conditions will include approved participation in the free and reduced school lunch program. Early indications show our enrollment in the Bluejay Academy will be at an all-time high. We expanded this offering to now include grades 6-12 in a full time virtual format. Students enrolled in this program are also eligible to participate in the many extra-curricular programs offered by our district.

We are also making changes to our school operations. Secondary principals are working on routing students in the building to minimize contact during passing periods. Plans are being made to increase the number of lunch periods so fewer students are in the lunch room at one time. Sanitizing protocols have been revised with new products and will be increased. Every effort is being made to maximize air flow in all buildings. Students will be required to adhere to seating charts on buses, in classrooms and at lunch. These and other recommendations are critical guidance from the Centers for Disease Control to limit transmission of COVID-19. I know many of you have watched other school districts take various approaches that are much

different than how we are planning to begin school. Some of our neighbors to the south are beginning either completely virtual or with split schedules. Our decision making process has been driven by the current conditions in Logan County. When comparing the latest data, the current infection rate for Oklahoma County is over four times higher than Logan County when adjusted for the difference in population. We will continue to monitor our current conditions to make the best decisions for our district locally. I would ask for parental support of these changes and assistance in communicating them to your children as we hope our “new normal” is temporary.

Experts have said it could take as long as two years to catch our students up from the learning time lost. I know this has been a difficult time for many of our families. The changes our lives have undergone in the past four plus months have been very stressful. Our staff is not immune to the same stress that has plagued our families. I would ask that we all work together as a team to provide the best learning experience possible. Over the past eight years, I’ve seen this community come together in a crisis. Regardless of your views about the current situation politically, an educational crisis exists that requires us to rally for our children. They need to be in school and the school needs your support. Let’s work together to get our students where they need to go.