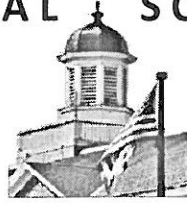


PAWLING CENTRAL SCHOOL DISTRICT

Kim Fontana
Superintendent of Schools



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Small Size ~ Diverse Opportunities

May 27, 2020

Dear Pawling Families, Students and Staff,

I am writing to you to provide information on our planning process for student awards and celebrations particularly as these relate to honoring the class of 2020.

As you may be aware, we conducted a Thought Exchange focused on the following question:

As we enter the springtime in a context of potential ongoing school closure and certain social distancing, we would like to invite student, family, and staff ideas for celebrating our scholars, athletes, musicians, and artists. What are your suggestions?

One hundred eighteen people participated in the exchange and generated eighty-one suggestions. Based on those suggestions and conferring with senior class officers, we planned for an in-person, socially distanced graduation ceremony outside. It was clear that our students were seeking a common experience and that a virtual celebration, no matter how elaborate, was not going to replace a physical memory of a common celebration. Our goal was to enable the students to be together, socially distanced, and allow for families to view the graduation ceremony, albeit, of necessity from their cars. This plan would have required dividing the class into three separate events to comply with Executive Orders, nevertheless we felt it would have achieved as much of what was prioritized in Thought Exchange and among the students. Our counsel felt this plan was consistent with Executive Orders and we felt we would be able to maintain safety, order, and social distancing.

On Thursday, May 22, the County Executive issued a memorandum to School Superintendents in Dutchess County. This memorandum, which is available on our website, clarifies the County's interpretation of the Governor's Executive orders and limits options for graduations to three: virtual graduations, drive-in graduations, drive-up graduations. Drive-in and drive-up graduations only permit up to 10 officiants to be outside of their cars. They do not allow students to participate outside of their cars. The memo specifies that diplomas may be received by students only through their car windows in the case of drive in or drive up ceremonies. While the memorandum curtailed our plans, the County Executive is working to ensure safety for all residents of Dutchess County and to provide clarity.

Given this development, we returned to thought exchange and conversations with class officers and saw that the drive-in movie theater idea had earned the next highest rankings and excitement, following those that are no longer permitted. As a result, we have arranged for a drive-in movie celebration on June 18, along with a virtual graduation, that will allow all the

students to be together (something our in-person plan could not allow for) albeit within their vehicles.

Based on the information we have at present, delaying our celebration into the summer or next winter is unlikely to allow for an opportunity for the whole class to celebrate in person. This graduation will certainly be different from others, but we anticipate that it will be no less memorable. We are excited to continue to plan for a worthy celebration of our senior class.

We are able to continue our other celebratory plans for seniors, fourth graders, eighth graders, athletes and artists. However, based on the County Executive's memo, all such celebrations that are not virtual require that students and families remain inside their vehicles. Adhering to these guidelines will require some adjustments, but we continue to be confident that they will be different and memorable.

I will end by thanking our administrators, PTA, PTSA, and students for ongoing involvement, persistence, and commitment to celebrating our students and their accomplishments in ways that are special, memorable, and safe.

Sincerely,



Kim Fontana

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