

Dear Preston Learning Community,

Thank you again for all of your effort and support as we manage these challenging times. Several important events have taken place since our last day of school on June 18, 2020. Two of the most significant events were the setting of the **Board of Education FY 21 district budget** that was accomplished on July 1 and the issuance by the Commissioner of Education of the **Adapt, Advance, Achieve: Connecticut's Plan to Learn and Grow Together** on June 30, 2020.

Setting the district budget for **FY 21** had significant challenges, but with the help of NFA freezing its tuition rates for one year and a retirement along with several other reductions, the budget was set. The Board pursued the reduction of \$363,000 from their original request with a focus on preserving staff and programs recognizing the pending need for all hands on deck in the coming school year. No existing staff were eliminated; however, there was a need to shift staff assignments that lead to a reduction of one section of grade three, moving from three classroom sections to two. We recognized that the setting of this new budget was establishing a baseline off of which to work. There will likely be several adjustments necessary through the summer and into next year based on the dynamic and shifting circumstances of responding to COVID-19 and other priorities of the district.

Just a few days ago, the Commissioner of Education released a much anticipated fifty-page document entitled **Adapt, Advance, Achieve: Connecticut's Plan to Learn and Grow**. In the ensuing few days, the leadership of Preston Public Schools and many area superintendents have initiated a full review of the report. The guiding principles of the document are: (1) Safeguarding the health and safety of students and staff; (2) Allowing ALL students the opportunity to return to school FULL time starting the fall; (3) Monitoring the school, student, and staff and, when necessary, potentially canceling classes in the future to appropriately contain COVID-19 spread; (4) Emphasizing equity, access, and support to the students and communities that are emerging from this historic disruption; (5) Fostering strong two-way communication with partners such as families, educators, and staff, and (6) Factoring into decisions about reopening the challenges to the physical safety, social-emotional well-being, and the mental health needs of our students when they are not in school.

We recognize the continuous, shifting, and often contradictory flow of news as well as individual circumstances and concerns that help frame the challenge of school reopening. The district has several teams in place that have begun to develop a response to the state guidelines, including a Reopening Team, a Social-Emotional Learning Team, a Curriculum, Instruction, and Professional Development Team, a district leadership team, a district safety team, and of course, the Board of Education. We will use the information gathered from the recent parent, staff, and student surveys, as well as the independent input shared by parents, staff, and community members along with future engagement strategies to help frame our response to the state guidelines. **We continue to be aware that this is a dynamic and fluid situation that could change at a moment's notice. A draft of our district plan is due to the state by July 24, 2020.**

As you can see, there is much work to do in a short time. Our focus will be a return to school full time for students starting on **Monday, August 31, 2020.**

Please monitor Facebook, email, text, and our webpage for further updates. Please contact the Superintendent's office or your building principals with any questions or concerns.

Have a safe, healthy, and peaceful Fourth of July!

Roy M. Seitsinger, Jr., Ph.D.
Superintendent of Schools