

Dear Caldwell County Schools Community,

In looking at the need for, the ability to, and the data associated with the return to school on a more normal schedule I want to share with you some information. From the beginning of the year, we have maintained the belief that having our students in school was the best way for students to learn. We've had to balance that belief with the reality of the global COVID-19 pandemic, but more accurately, the impact of COVID in our community.

The school year began for our students on August 24 with the students starting off with virtual or distance learning per the Governor's "strong recommendation." The Governor's "strong recommendation" was for schools to not have in-person classes prior to Monday, September 28. On Tuesday, September 1, we made the decision to go ahead and begin in-person instruction on Monday, September 14 on the previously planned hybrid schedule. This announcement gave our families and staff two nearly two weeks to make final preparations. On Thursday, October 1, we announced that we would be starting our normal five-day-a-week schedule beginning Monday, October 19. This gave families and staff the needed notice to make adjustments. At the time that we announced a return to a normal school schedule, the COVID activity in Caldwell County and in our schools was not at an extremely high rate. The rate in the county was much higher than it was in the schools. However, after we were in school five-days-a-week, we began to have a rapidly growing number of students and staff being quarantined. This created a nearly impossible environment for us to have any type of normal school experience, as we weren't able to keep up with having enough staff in the schools to teach classes and supervise the students. Simultaneously, we began seeing large numbers of students quarantined from contact with someone positive for COVID-19 (almost exclusively from contact outside of the schools). At this time, we had to make the decision to fall back to a hybrid schedule beginning November 4. As we continued on with stability on the hybrid schedule, the Governor issued an Executive Order prohibiting in-person school beginning Monday, November 23 and running until January 4. After Christmas, we returned to school virtually for one week as we monitored COVID cases following the holidays before returning to a hybrid schedule on January 11. While we maintained relatively low COVID cases in the schools, Caldwell County was running in the top five counties in Kentucky when it came to the rate of new COVID cases each day. During this time, our staff was diligent in making sure we followed safety protocols in the schools so we could remain open. We've been able to operate consistently on this schedule now for two months. As January was coming to a close, we saw COVID cases throughout Caldwell County consistently dropping. The daily COVID rate never dropped to a rate of 25 new cases per day for Caldwell County on the state's Daily Incident Rate Map, but the rate was dropping into the 30's. As February began, the daily rate began to increase. Throughout February, we saw a relatively consistent rate of new COVID cases in Caldwell County. During this time, we also were able to maintain a steady decrease in COVID activity in the schools. Even though COVID data was somewhat stable in Caldwell County, our county consistently ranked as having one of the highest rates of new COVID cases in Kentucky. The majority of days in February saw Caldwell County in the top five counties in Kentucky for the rate of new cases. There were multiple days where Caldwell County had the highest rate of any county in Kentucky. On February 25, the data from the state was skewed when close to 200 COVID

cases from the Western Kentucky Correctional Facility were entered at the state as cases from Caldwell County instead of Lyon County. From this point on, we were able to use Pennyriple Health District's Facebook page to get our data. We have been using this data throughout the year, as it is a more real-time picture of our community than what we get from the state. Over the past week, we've seen a steady decline in COVID cases in our community. We continue to see very low COVID activity in our schools. The combination of these give us the opportunity to look at increasing in-person instruction in our schools.

While we will see other school districts going back to school a week or two before we do, I want to remind you that the rate of COVID activity in these other counties has been nothing like what we have had in Caldwell County. It has taken a couple of weeks for Caldwell County's COVID numbers to decrease and stabilize before we could make the same transition back to school that many others are making at this time.

One of the things that we learned from the last time we transitioned back to five-days-a-week was that we had a sharp increase in student contact quarantines. While we had a good plan for in-person instruction and for students who were completely virtual (NTI), we struggled to work with the students that were being quarantined. In coming up with the best plan to finish out the year, we want to make sure that we have a plan in place that prevents those students from falling through the cracks over the next three months.

In looking at the final few months of this school year, we also have to have a plan that allows us to handle the various academic testing that will be going on. We will have to have one day a week for at least four weeks for mandatory state testing of our virtual students, as well as our assessments that will be used to determine summer school needs and to help provide data for schools and families when it comes to students possibly repeating a grade.

Return to School:

2020-2021 School Calendar

- Friday, March 12 is a Professional Development Day (no student instruction)
- Monday, March 15 is a no school day
- Spring Break is April 4-9

Beginning Tuesday, March 16, we will be returning to school Monday-Thursday with all students each day except for those who have families that have chosen to be virtual/NTI.

Mondays-Thursdays will be in-person instruction for all students who have been on a hybrid schedule. Fridays will allow for schools to spend additional time working with students who have been quarantined, and to bring in targeted students, assess students with iReady and state assessments, moving of furniture as needed and deep cleaning of the schools, and for the general changes that will need to be made based on the week's COVID impact.

We are glad to be able to double the amount of time that we will have with our students in class. While this is not a schedule that we have used yet this year, it does allow us to meet as many of the needs that we have while we increase in-person instruction with our students. It also leaves

Fridays as the day when students will not be at school in order to create as few changes as possible for our families as we increase our time in school. While this will be our first time going four days a week, the majority of districts around us that are going back are doing so on a four-day-a-week schedule. We are all working together to try to provide the maximum learning opportunities for our students; while maintaining COVID protocols and meeting the needs of students and staff as we begin to double the number of students in our schools.

We all have seen how difficult the past year has been when it comes to school. I appreciate the patience, flexibility, and support of our students that everyone has demonstrated through these unusual and challenging times.

Respectfully,

Heath Cartwright
Interim Superintendent
Caldwell County Schools