

Good afternoon,

This past week, the patrons of Dickinson County have been issued an order, which includes several guidelines the community is required to follow as we are all battling the rampant spread of Coronavirus. Abilene Schools, USD #435, also received a set of recommendations from the Dickinson County Health Department for our consideration. The school system has worked hard throughout this first semester to take measures to reduce the spread of COVID-19. As we move into our Thanksgiving break, we wanted to give you a quick update on how Abilene Schools are approaching the end of this first semester.

Because we value your input, over the past two weeks we have asked parents and our staff to complete surveys to help us determine a direction that best provides the education we hope to provide in a manner that also promotes the safety and health of our students and staff. In addition to the survey results, several patrons, teachers, and staff have reached out to us via e-mail, texts, and phone calls. Several school district leaders met with Dickinson County leadership, as well. We want to thank each and every one of you for taking the time to share your thoughts!

Please understand, the decisions the board and administration must make regarding COVID will always be viewed through several different lenses. We look at our staff, our parents, our community, and our health department's recommendations. All of these weigh heavily in our decisions, but none more heavily than our students. When we started our school year, it was everyone's goal to keep students in our classrooms for as long as we could do so safely. We have, and will continue, to evaluate each school on their own merits when making decisions about in person and remote learning.

At this time, we still believe that having our students in our buildings is what is best for the community's health and their education. They simply learn better and are socially and emotionally fed by being with our great staff and their friends. We continue to do our best to socially distance them and require them to be in masks. When they are not in our building, we do not have control over those factors. Please understand COVID-19 places our district in a fluid situation and we will be continuously evaluating the numbers of sick and quarantined staff and students to determine whether or not we need to pivot into a remote learning situation.

In order to keep our schools open, we also need your help as parents. Please do your best to keep your students in a mask and socially distant from others when out in public. Be honest with us when your student has symptoms of Covid and keep

them home. Should we need to call you about your student being a close contact, we are asking you to extend grace to our teachers, administrators, and especially our nurses when we make these difficult decisions. Please understand that by doing these things you show support to our teachers, staff, and administrators.

Rafael Nadal once said, “Enduring means accepting. Accepting things as they are and not as you wish them to be, and then looking ahead, not behind.” We ask you to remember this as we make decisions we feel are best for your students, based on the numbers at that moment.

We especially want to thank our teachers! They are working harder than ever to provide your students with the education that you expect from USD 435. Thank you to Nurse McGivney and Nurse Foltz as they are putting in overwhelming hours to ensure the safety of our staff and students. Lastly, thank you to our administrators who are balancing curriculum, staff, students, and attempting to give our students as "normal" a year as possible in this time that is anything but typical.

Regards,

Kyle Becker, BOE President
USD 435

Greg Brown, Superintendent
USD #435