

August 2, 2020

An Open Letter to Fall Athletic and Extracurricular Parents

Dear Chardon Parents/Guardians:

The safety, health and well-being of students, staff and community is the number one priority in Chardon Schools. I understand that there remains much uncertainty surrounding the fall athletic and extracurricular activities season. That is an unfortunate outcome of a vacuum in leadership that has existed in state-level organizations since the COVID pandemic onset and closure of schools in Ohio on March 16, 2020, that has left school districts continuing to look for answers that appropriately protect our students.

We are also seeing a complex and changing landscape with respect to our own county-wide Risk Assessment Level (currently Orange) which is trending toward higher risk levels on a consistent basis. We will continue to consider that indicator of risk within Geauga County as a component of our overall response plan.

I have received several inquiries concerning the status of fall sports and extracurriculars in the wake of full-remote instruction in Cuyahoga County, as well as pleas to continue these activities in our school district. School districts across Ohio are struggling with the best way to safely return to classroom instruction and extracurricular activities. We are being directed that our primary objective is to reduce/minimize risk at every level. The use of face coverings, social distancing and a variety of protocols are becoming the standard under which schools will operate - if they open at all.

Many districts have announced full remote instruction to begin the school year - likely for the first nine weeks of the year as a start. We are being directed that it is unsafe for students to sing in classrooms or play musical instruments and that the use of classroom fans creates a hazard of spreading the virus and their use should seriously be reconsidered. These are just a handful of the myriad recommendations we are processing to keep students safe.

I have been hopeful in the last few weeks that our state-level organizations would provide consistent guidance for school districts concerning athletics, along with other important school operational areas. Unfortunately, that has not happened. What we

received is recommendations for returning athletes to activities, in front of few or no spectators, that seem unmanageable at best and lacking in resources (e.g. testing student athletes) at worst.

To this end, several Superintendents have appealed to the Western Reserve Conference (our interscholastic athletic conference) in the hope that we might make a decision on a conference-wide basis so that school districts may operate in a consistent manner. Contrary to rumors circulating, a vote did not occur last week - only discussion on potential solutions to the issue. There is a meeting scheduled on Wednesday of this week to address the request for a specific action plan, but I do not know if any decision will be reached by that group. If we do not accomplish the goal of a coherent response plan, then school districts will act independently to do what they believe is in the best interest of student athletes.

It is important to understand that compliance with athletic guidelines that have been circulated will be costly. As only one example, under these proposals, a student athlete and team staff members will need a negative COVID test not more than 72 hours prior to every interscholastic competition. At an estimated \$150/test administration, the compliance costs are considerable with no answer as to who is paying for this testing or whether resources exist to support the testing program being discussed. Estimates for an average school district have ranged from \$250,000 to upwards of \$400,000 in order to comply with the guidelines being disseminated. How those costs will be handled locally in any fall season is unclear at this time.

I have been involved in youth, high school and collegiate sports as a parent, coach and official for over twenty years. I have a great understanding and appreciation for the work of coaches with student athletes and recognize the important role that athletics and extracurricular activities play in the social-emotional well-being of our children. I am also being asked to make decisions/recommendations that impact the health and safety of every student that enters our doors. Student athletes that participate in an athletic competition or extracurricular activity over a given weekend return to the classroom on Monday with a potential of exposure for those that did not participate in that activity.

Further, I understand the importance of senior-year activities on our students. Unfortunately, the initial phase of the pandemic in spring 2020 saw the elimination of an entire athletic season. In addition, the Class of 2020 lost important culminating events such as Prom, a traditional Commencement, and many others. This pandemic

has already exacted a cost that can never truly be recovered. I understand the importance of senior-year events to our students and don't want to see any of those be lost for our students.

I understand your concerns related to interscholastic athletics and the associated extracurricular activities. I want to reassure you that I do not take lightly the consideration of cancelling any activities that diminish the experience of students in our schools. I also take very seriously my responsibility to attempt to minimize risk in the current situation. My recommendations will attempt to balance those competing interests with the health and safety of students always being my primary goal.

We will continue to keep you informed regarding the status of fall sports and extracurricular activities in Chardon Schools.

Sincerely,

Michael P. Hanlon, Jr., Ph.D.

Superintendent