

A View from the Principal's Office

August 21, 2020

I hope that you and your family are well. This summer has been unlike any other I have experienced in my 35 years at Hartford. Our administrators, working with our district leadership, have spent hundreds of hours in consideration of opening school while prioritizing student, staff, and community safety and well-being. All of us have been informed by the crisis schooling that we were forced to engage in last spring. From the beginning, we have had time to plan for this reopening in ways that we could not last spring. We knew that we needed to design our school to ensure that we are able to partner with all learners. I have shared with our staff that we need to remember that this is the only year that our students will have in their grade and we need to design learning that meets students' needs while inviting them to dream. We need to be inspiring.

Hartford High School has made a strong commitment to flexible, individualized learning. Our recent practice has transitioned well to the times we find ourselves. We are confident that our school is prepared to support learning that is rigorous, individualized, and flexible. The first step in imagining this school is to provide our students with choice or agency. We did this by allowing our learners to determine if they want to start the year in our hybrid, every-other-day learning model or as remote learners. Further, it was important to us that students had the ability to move between these models if it made sense for them and their families. While we are not able to support a willy-nilly approach, we do want our learners to make informed decisions, this requires our students to have the ability to transition from one model to the other.

From the beginning we planned for remote learning – we have not wavered from this. Our teachers will be sharing their lessons to a remote audience, some of whom will be in the room with them; others will be located in our communities. We know that there are certain advantages to being present in the school building. Some of our students need the regular, face-to-face, in-person interaction with their teachers. Others need the embedded routine and return to normalcy represented in a school day, some need to see their peers; each of our

students and their families has had to weigh these with the perceived risk of returning to school. We recognize that the traditional classroom concept of a small box within a bigger box needs to expand – given our technology, our classroom is now a collection of students enrolled in a class wherever they are located. Our teachers will spend / have spent significant time in preparation for this new mode of instruction. Our goal is to be fully prepared for the return to learning that will occur on Sept. 8.

It is vitally important that our community begin to see the preeminence of “learning” vs. “schooling.” We have spent a lot of energy considering how we can create a learning community regardless of the location of our learners. We are also very much aware that some of our students need to be in the physical school in order to learn; our plan has allowed for this.

Finally, I need to ask for your partnership as we work together to support our learners. We are requiring everyone in the building to wear masks, practice social distancing, and to wash their hands. Please speak with your child(ren) about this and convey that this is a non-negotiable. While I am confident that we can open school safely, it is imperative on all of us to engage in these simple, inexpensive practices to do our best to maintain our own safety and that of our community.

I know that many of you have been torn as you make the decision to return to school in person or to engage remotely. Approximately 15 % of our students have indicated that they plan to access their learning fully remotely, the rest plan on coming to school every other day. We are looking forward to partnering with all of our learners regardless of their chosen mode.

Take care,
Nelson Fogg