

DISTRICT 202 COMMUNITY COLUMN

By Dr. Lane Abrell
Superintendent of Schools
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Dear District 202 Community,

To borrow from one of the themes of the 1989 book, “The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People” by Stephen Covey, there is a saying that defines the start and the continuation of this school year:

“The main thing is to keep the main thing the main thing.”

We started this school year with a firm, public commitment to have all students in school, full-time. That commitment followed the 2020-21 school year which started with remote learning and progressed, slowly, to students being in school five half-days last spring.

The state directed last May that in-person learning would be the priority and expectation this year.

But more importantly, we knew then, and know now, that the best place for learning and teaching is in school, in our classrooms, where trained adults can most effectively and efficiently serve and support students.

Based on the COVID-19 metrics at the time, our Board of Education even approved a plan for masks to be optional this school year. The plan also included the flexibility to micro-manage our ongoing pandemic response to ensure everyone’s safety while keeping students in school to the greatest extent possible.

We (and so many others) were cautiously optimistic for the school year ahead.

Then, on August 4th, Gov. Pritzker imposed a mask mandate as COVID-19 stats (due to the Delta variant) started to rise again.

That was the first of many hard curve balls that have been thrown at schools this year.

Among many challenges, schools have had to deal with transportation, staffing, and food shortages and the ongoing political debates about masking and the governor’s authority. Not to mention the continuing demands of managing the pandemic itself including rolling quarantines through schools as both students and adults have contracted or been exposed to COVID-19.

Without debating the validity of those challenges, it is accurate to simply say that they have all distracted, to varying degrees, from our “...main thing...”

Which is, now and always, to serve and support students.

Despite all those incredible difficulties which few could predict much less plan for, most of our families and staff have worked incredibly hard to remember why we are here.

By the time you read this column we will have had approximately 45 days of in-school student attendance and completed the 1st Quarter.

We were able to have successful Homecoming football games and athletics as well as dances and the community parade. Our students have come to school each day ready and excited to learn, to be with their teachers and friends again, to take part in extracurricular activities and athletics.

Our teachers, administrators, and staff have come to work each day ready to find even more ways to teach and work around mountains of new professional regulations, rules, and requirements. They may be impeded, but they're not going to be stopped.

Our Board of Education continues to do its best to protect the larger community's greater interests while balancing the Board's limited legal options with a vocal segment's right to speak their frustrations.

Starting a new school year and running a large government bureaucracy is always a complex process. It is even more complicated this year for reasons so far beyond our control that it's hard to even explain sometimes.

Yet, our focus is always on our students. Right where it should be.

If we keep it there, we will be well positioned for even greater success when this pandemic is eventually in our rearview mirror.

I continue to appreciate your patience and support. Together, we continue to prepare learners for the future.

Dr. Lane Abrell
Superintendent