

## DISTRICT 202 COMMUNITY COLUMN

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

Technically speaking, we started the 2021-2022 school year in March 2021, when we emphatically promised that students would be back in classrooms this fall, after nearly a year of remote and blended learning.

We are nearing the end of the first semester as you read this, and I am happy and proud to say we have kept our promise.

That may not seem like a big deal.

In fact, under more “normal” circumstances, it wouldn’t be – and frankly, under any circumstances it should never be - exceptional for a public entity to keep its promises.

But as we all know, the last two school years have been anything but normal.

Therefore, I am especially proud of this achievement considering the number of hoops and hurdles in our way. Chief among them, of course, is the continuing pandemic which, last spring and early summer, seemed to at least be fading to a manageable level, if not on its way out.

The Board of Education, after much sincere consideration, in July approved a plan to make masks optional for the start of the new school year.

Then the Delta variant of the Covid-19 virus took hold.

Very quickly, on August 4<sup>th</sup>, Gov. Pritzker mandated that masks be worn in schools. Suddenly, we were back to “Square One,” having to change our entire plan for the 2021-22 school year in a matter of weeks (again.)

But the one thing that did not change, was our promise to return students to the classroom and do everything in our power to give them a school experience as close to “normal” as we could, within the confines of the many health, educational, and political requirements facing us.

I could not be happier for, or prouder of our decision.

Despite the many real and significant challenges, returning kids to classrooms (and keeping them there to the best of our ability) was the very best thing we could do for our parents and guardians, for our teachers and staff, and most importantly, for the students.

And, all things considered, it’s been a very good first semester.

Academically, we continue to wait for final information about our performance on last spring's state assessments. The state is releasing that information in bits and pieces as it reworks the reporting system to reflect the impact of the pandemic. However, preliminary indications are that our students did fairly well all things considered.

Our high schools had great athletic success during the fall season, including three of our four football teams going to state.

The middle and high schools presented their full slate of fine arts programming – fall plays, band and choir concerts, etc.

Our elementary students got to do all the things they usually do in and out of the classroom as they develop and grow their learning skills, led by some of the most talented, dedicated educators working anywhere.

I have said it many times: remote learning is a wonderful addition to our educational toolbox, but students – children and adolescents and teens – need to be in school. With their friends, and talented professionals dedicated to their success.

Remember, this pandemic didn't start in a day, and it won't end in a day either (although it will likely end quicker if we all take some very simple steps.)

No matter how difficult Covid makes our lives, District 202 will always strive to do what is best for our students, families, staff, and community.

Together, we will continue to prepare learners for the future.

Dr. Lane Abrell  
Superintendent