



OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDENT

Talawanda School District
131 W. Chestnut St. Oxford, Ohio 45056
(513) 273-3100

April 29, 2020

Dear Talawanda Students, Parents, Families, Staff, and Community Members,

I hope this email finds people in our community safe and well!

I am writing today to make clear the reasons behind the decision to host a virtual graduation celebration to honor the Class of 2020 (as well as changes or cancellations of other end-of-the-year activities). First, please know that the well being of our students, staff and their families is a responsibility and a duty that we take very seriously. Talawanda prides itself on keeping safety a high priority. These are unprecedented times that no one has experienced before, and I certainly understand that people are not happy with the decision, but people must understand that the district must make decisions that are in the best interest and safety of all individuals in our schools and community!

Recently Talawanda lost our school treasurer due to COVID-19. We are deeply saddened by this loss, and it has made clear to our school community what this virus can do. One life lost is too many, and the district cannot and will not take risks that would put anyone at risk or in danger. The Butler County Health Commissioner and I have spoken many times during this crisis, and she supports the district in our efforts to keep people in our community safe.

I know and understand that our children have worked hard. Some have overcome tremendous challenges to reach this achievement. I believe our children deserve closure and recognition, and we will provide an opportunity to honor them in the most safe way possible. Please know that our administration and staff are heartbroken that the pandemic is impacting our schools, our students, and our celebrations. Please know that we are doing what we can do, while keeping everyone safe.

The Governor made a statement on April 28, 2020 that allowed schools to consider alternative ways to host graduations while emphasizing the importance of social distancing. He also mentioned that the number of people and the size of spaces are a factor. Please note that the Governor has not eliminated the restrictions he has put in place. Large group gatherings are still not allowed. In addition, the Ohio Department of Education has released graduation ceremony guidance. It recommends not to change the graduation date, not to hold face-to-face ceremonies, and to hold virtual ceremonies due to safety concerns for all. The Butler County Health Commissioner stated, "I support and applaud your decision." She also offered to contact people as well as write a letter supporting our virtual graduation ceremony.

Our planning team has been working not only on the graduation ceremony, but also planning for other educational needs as a result of the pandemic. Please know that we have considered a variety of potential plans for graduation that would include social distancing. We could not develop a plan that would include all students, maintain social distance, and ensure all students, staff, and family members would be safe. We considered a drive up ceremony where students and their families would stay in their cars. While this option may have worked, the ceremony would not have included speeches, students interacting with each other, and still put staff at risk, and in order to meet the restrictions for mass gatherings would have had to take place over multiple days. We also could not guarantee students and families would remain in their cars as evidenced by when Talawanda participated in the “lighting of the stadium” to honor the Class of 2020 that took place on April 20, 2020. A Butler County Sheriff’s deputy had to come to our high school to enforce the restrictions, and as this proved difficult, students had to be asked to exit the property. The third option to hold the ceremony in a bigger venue still had issues with our ability to guarantee social distancing. Not all students would be able to attend and participate due to their unique underlying health conditions. The fourth option was to move the ceremony to June or July. This option was eliminated due to the fact that there is no guarantee that restrictions will be lifted by that time. In fact, the Butler County Health Commissioner stated that she believes we would still have restrictions on large group gatherings due to the risks they pose to the safety and well being of citizens. In addition, some students have plans to be leaving the community soon after the school year ends and this would keep them from being recognized. Talawanda has been committed to recognizing the Class of 2020 in the most safe and fair way for ALL students.

While this decision was tough to make, it is the best and safest decision in light of the fact that we are experiencing a pandemic. Negativity, tearing down our school administration and staff, and misinformation shared via social media does not serve our students, staff, and community. This only serves to divide people and spread misinformation during a time that people need to stand by one another. It also only considers the individual who is healthy. Leaders have to make tough decisions sometimes, and in Talawanda we can be at peace knowing that we have made decisions that are in the best interests of everyone involved.

Again, Talawanda has already lost one staff member. I, myself, have been quarantined. We have others in our school district that have or have had the virus. I have seen people struggle to survive with this virus. I hear every day of more people that have become sick or who have lost a loved one. One life, one individual that becomes sick, one individual who struggles to survive when infected, one individual who passes the virus on to another person, or one person who succumbs to the virus is one too many! Governor DeWine did clarify today that the best way to host graduation ceremonies in Ohio is to host them virtually. The virtual graduation ceremony will not be the typical graduation experience, but it will keep everyone safe!

Keeping All Safe,

Edward Theroux
Talawanda School District Superintendent