

FHPS Video Transcript, Forest Hills Forecast, July 17, 2020

Hello Forest Hills families and staff members. Thanks for tuning into the eighth edition of the Forest Hills Forecast. Today, I'd like to speak with you about three things: a little bit more detail about the state's return to school roadmap; secondly, an important concept known as social groupings; and finally a candid conversation about the range of emotions that exist as we think about the possibility of returning to school this fall.

First a little bit more detail about the Michigan Safe Start Plan and Return to School Roadmap. The decision to have students return to in-person learning is all based on conditions, whether we're in Phase 3, which would require remote learning, or Phase 4, where we currently are, which would be returning to school with a variety of safety requirements in place. It's all predicated on the state of the virus. Right now in West Michigan, and our region, we're in Phase 4. We want to make sure we stay there so we can return to school with a variety of safety requirements that will be in place. If we are in Phase 4 and we return to school, even though we'll have in-person learning in our classrooms, just about everything else in our schools could be different to make sure we are doing everything possible to keep our students and staff safe. If we happen to slide back to Phase 3, that would require remote learning. And if we're in Phase 3, our remote learning program will be far more comprehensive than what we were able to provide last spring when we first began remote learning. No matter what phase we're in, if you want for your child 100% remote learning for the entirety of the next school year, we will have that option available as well. More details to come on that.

Second, I'd like to speak with you about this concept of social groupings. It's important that we find ways to minimize the amount of interactions our students and staff have throughout the school day. Schools can be places where hundreds of people come and gather. What we want to do is to minimize the interactions in that space. So for example, in terms of visitors coming to our schools, we're looking to keep all visitors outside of the building. If you need to come and pick up your child, let's say for a dental appointment, we'd have you call into the school and the child will come outside of the school to meet you and have that hand off at that point in time.

In the elementary buildings, we want to make sure we're creating conditions where students are with their classroom peers and not interacting with others whether that's at lunch, whether that's at recess, whether that's in our specials programs and our teachers coming to the classroom to

do that. This is a concept we have already tried this summer to great success with our Forest Hills childcare program, as we have students in small groups where they don't interact with the other groups throughout the day. This minimizes any potential spread of any sort of illness and allows us to do any sort of contact tracing. It works wonderfully and we would look to continue that in our schools this fall.

At the secondary level, this is a little bit more challenging because students are moving throughout the day more often. Regardless of these challenges, we are working through a variety of possible scenarios to minimize the amount of interactions students would have, and staff members would have, with other students throughout the school day. Expect more updates on that in the days to come.

Finally, for our candid conversation, it's important to recognize that right now there's perhaps more anxiety than ever before as we see COVID-19 cases really moving upwards in our southern states. It's important to understand, that there are some people who are very concerned about the possibility of students returning to school in the fall, and that there are other people who are ready for their students to come back tomorrow.

I'm not here to say which emotions are right or wrong. It's all what people are feeling. It's important that we recognize that. It's important that we respect wherever it is that people may be. We don't know what their prior health history of anyone is, who they're caring for at home, again a variety of situations that we cannot all see ourselves. But, what we can do is support one another, wherever people happen to be on this. For those of you who are very very concerned, I'd ask you to take a look at where we are in West Michigan. We don't have evidence of community spread here in the Forest Hills region. Our health department, state officials, those of us in the school districts, in the medical community, are monitoring this data on a daily basis, and we would not return students to an environment that's not safe. I won't do that for your students; I wouldn't do that for my own children. And for those of you who are on the other end of the continuum, and you're looking at saying, "Hey, what's the big deal?" I simply ask for your patience. We are working with partners and collaborators in an unprecedented fashion: requirements from our own local health department, the state health officials, looking at guidance from the Centers for Disease Control, working with the latest in medical research that's come out on this ever-changing situation with our pandemic.

Again our goal is to have students come back to face-to-face learning in person in our schools, but to do that in a safe manner, not only for our students, but for all of the adults who help our kids each and every day.

In the weeks to come, we're going to take you behind the scenes and have you understand better all the things that we're doing to make sure our schools are the cleanest and the safest they've ever been for all of our students and staff in preparation for this coming school year.

Until then, take care and stay safe.