



Watershed Families,

The superintendents' meeting with the Minnesota Department of Education and the Health Department and Governor Walz's public announcement last week called for schools to make decisions for fall classes based on a number of data points. Schools are to look at cases per county, ability to meet space requirements, building ventilation and more.

I had the pleasure of speaking with many parents in the past few weeks, and staff was able to speak with the students who showed up at our last student meeting. Thank you all for your input.

Over the summer, the department of education asked us to plan for different scenarios, distance learning, hybrid learning and in-person learning. Watershed has four different phases for opening.

Watershed Phases of Opening

Phase 1	Distance Learning	Students are learning remotely via Chromebooks
Phase 2*	Distance Learning +	Students are primarily learning remotely via Chromebooks but one day per week, staff will be available to meet with small groups of students at school.
Phase 3*	Hybrid	Students in small group A attend school in person Monday and Tuesday, all students are online Wednesday, Students in small group B attend school in person Thursday and Friday. The days the student's small group is not in-person or online are independent work days.
Phase 4*	In-person	All students are back in the building five days per week.

*Anytime students and staff are in the building, the Watershed COVID-19 Safety Plan will be followed

For a number of reasons, the Watershed school board has determined that we will be using Phase 1, Distance Learning for the first quarter of the 2020-21 academic year:

1. **Student and Staff Safety**

The cases in our county and in the cities that Watershed students live in continue to rise. The governor listed the following recommendations based solely on positive COVID-19 cases. Additionally, we have a high percentage of students and staff who are in the high-risk category for the virus.

Due to our small size, one student or staff member being exposed to the virus and attending school unknowingly would put ALL students and staff at risk. Losing one student or staff member because we chose to open too soon is a risk we are not willing to take.

Recommended policy options based on 14-day case rate range from MDE/Gov. Walz

Policy Option	Range (14-day case rate per 10,000 people)
In-person learning for all students	0 to less than 10
Elementary in-person, Middle/high school hybrid	10 to less than 20
Both hybrid	20 to less than 30
Elementary hybrid, Middle/high school distance	30 to less than 50
Both distance	50 or more

The summary of the State's plan can be found here: [Safe Learning Plan](#)

2. Consistency

Watershed students learn best when they have some amount of predictability and consistency. This is the reason the board chose to go with Distance Learning for the entire first quarter, rather than opening up to the possibility of changing learning models every two weeks. During the governor's address, schools were asked to give at least one week's notice to stakeholders regarding their plans for opening. We know that is not enough time for families to adequately plan for child care, meal planning and scheduling.

Again, due to our small size, if even one student or staff member was known to have had contact with a person with COVID-19, we would all have to quarantine for 14 days. Possibly having to change learning models multiple times would be disruptive to the students' learning.

Two of the largest districts in the state, Minneapolis and Saint Paul, have declared distance learning for the start of the school year. While we do not follow their academic calendars as an independent school, they do have more extensive resources when it comes to acquiring data.

3. Planning, Instructional Models and Community Building

From the feedback we received from our parents, students, board members and community members, our spring distance learning model worked better than many other schools. Our teachers were innovative and engaging and we are one of the few schools that taught in real time.

Staff has ideas on how to further improve on what worked well and on ways to improve things that needed it. We will still teach classes in real-time, but some teachers have opted to teach from their classrooms to have a more authentic feel and to have access to regular teaching supplies such as a Smart Board. Teachers will record at least one lesson per day in the event that a student misses a class due to caring for a younger sibling who is at home or needs to attend an appointment.

1:1 Devices will be available for all Watershed students. Our students will have access to a Chromebook for the duration of the school year. This will help with equity and making devices 1:1, we will reduce the likelihood of transmission of the virus through shared devices. Students will be using Chromebooks this year instead of personal devices for testing security, privacy concerns and for teacher assistance/monitoring.

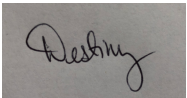
Our students gave feedback regarding the desire for more connection. As you know, in-person learning at Watershed is all about a sense of community, belonging and equity. Where we usually had one all-school meeting per week, students requested that we have two so that even while separated physically, they could take time to connect with their peers and teachers.

4. Extend Time for Observation and Mitigate Risk

COVID-19 is a “novel” virus, meaning that this strain of coronavirus is fairly new and the scientific community is still learning and gathering data about it. The longer they have, the more information schools and the general public will have. Knowing that Watershed will have all of first quarter to observe the data and infection rates, the better equipped we will be when we do return to in-person classes.

We believe following the distance learning phase is in the best interest of our school and greater community. An informational parent meeting will be held via Google Meet on August 25 at 6:00 p.m., check your email for a link to join by internet or phone call. Supply pick up for last names A-I will be on August 26th from 5-7:00 p.m., and for last names J-Z on August 27th from 5-7:00 p.m. More information regarding supplies and meals will come in a separate letter.

If you have any questions in the meantime, you can reach me at (952) 649-0485.

A square image containing a handwritten signature in black ink. The signature appears to read "Destiny".

Destiny Sparks
Executive Director
Watershed High School