



North Carolina School for the Deaf

517 West Fleming Dr., Morganton, NC 28655

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September 4, 2020

Greeting Parents, Students, and Staff:

I would like to extend a heartfelt appreciation for the tremendous efforts that the North Carolina School for the Deaf (NCSD) community has put forth to ensure that our students are successfully engaging in learning. Multiple Educators have reported 100% attendance in Virtual Learning Sessions. Coursework that has been sent home for completion is retrieved and returned faithfully from many families. Parents, caregivers, and guardians have been actively present and involved in Virtual Learning Sessions. Provisions to meet the social/emotional health needs of our students have been consistently provided and continue to evolve with need. Meals will begin next week for those that have requested them. These actions prove the iteration of #NCSDStrong, and that the efforts of the entire community will further ensure our success this school year!

I am writing to provide an update on the NCSD status for in-person learning. An update on recent data collected by the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), has yielded over 160,000 cases of COVID-19 in NC including; 2062 in Burke County, 256 active positive cases, 8 hospitalizations, and over 15,000 positive cases from the counties in which our students reside. In addition to reviewing the latest data, we have reviewed parental feedback, and guidance from Governor Roy Cooper.

Additional data considered is that 30% of all parents surveyed wish for their students to participate in a remote learning environment. NCSD is a school with a residential component. Over 60% of our students within the age range of three to twenty-two years young reside on-campus. The highest number of students in the residence hall are in the age range of fifteen to twenty-two years young. Students return to their home counties (over thirty counties) every weekend and engage in their community. Therefore, data from similar entities such as universities, were examined for potential insight for COVID-19 impact. The University of North Carolina College systems opened for on-campus coursework (some fully in-person or hybrid) approximately two weeks ago statewide. Within that timeframe, multiple campuses experienced COVID cluster outbreaks (consisting of five or more positive infections). According to the NC DHHS, UNC Chapel Hill presented with eleven clusters that were tied to residential housing and Greek housing. NC State University reported twenty-four clusters and required all students to move off-campus. Due to the clusters, UNC Chapel Hill and Eastern Carolina University have switched to fully online learning and have reduced student housing (Kasakove, 2020). Appalachian State University currently has a cluster outbreak amongst the wrestling team, and a total of forty-seven active cases (University, 2020).

Based on the current COVID-19 trend data, the NCSD Parent Survey, and guidance from the Center for Disease Control, the Leadership Team at NCSD has decided to complete the first nine-week reporting period (October 16, 2020) on *Plan C/Remote Learning Only*. We continue to acknowledge that Remote Learning Only is challenging for our students and families, and that face-to-face instruction is the most ideal learning environment. However, there remains noted risk to bring students together from over 30 counties into one location with more than half residing on campus, and with three shifts of staff coming in-and-out daily. This is especially concerning because we serve students who present with more significant medical complexities, as well as other special circumstances that may be at an increased risk for severe complications compared to other students.

We will continue to watch the COVID-19 data and trends and will update you on possible changes to our continued implementation of Plan C/Remote Learning Only, on or before October 9, 2020. We appreciate your support and understanding. Thank you for continuing to come out to the bus stops to obtain course material/supplies on a weekly basis. Bus route times will remain the same. Parents of local/day students may drop off student packets and pick up student technology and distance learning materials at the flagpole from 3:00-4:00 at NCSD. You will continue to receive additional information from the Principal, Amy Sargent, on how we have and will continue to address remote learning challenges that may arise.

With excitement we are welcoming several new educators to our team. The hiring process for staff is long and we cannot wait for them to begin. The NCSD Leadership Team is also completing the hiring process for several key members. We look forward to their beginning and enhancing our program. More information is forthcoming.

We appreciate all you are doing to ensure our students continue to make progress on IEP goals and academics. Please stay safe and contact me by phone at 828 432-5200 or by sending an e-mail to mark.patrick@esdb.dpi.nc.gov.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mark D. Patrick". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Mark D. Patrick
School Director
North Carolina School for the Deaf

cc: Amy Sargent, Principal
cc: Dr. Thea Wilson, School Audiologist and Director of Enrollment

References

University, A. (2020, September 1). Latest Updates - App State Coronavirus Information 09-01-20. Retrieved September 02, 2020, from <https://www.appstate.edu/go/coronavirus/updates/09-01-20-confirmed-cases/>

Kasakove, S. (2020, August). North Carolina reports over 2,000 new coronavirus cases as university clusters increase. *News and Observer*. <https://www.newsobserver.com/news/coronavirus/article245293565.html#storylink=cpy>