



June 15, 2020

Dear Cornerstone Cardinal Community,

I have written a few “end of the year” letters to school communities throughout my time, but this is, without question, the strangest. Before I get to our current circumstances, I want to share just how impressed I am with the entire school community. We pulled together, made the best of many tough situations, and stayed strong despite times that almost seemed perfectly designed to break schools. We managed to top that off by holding a singular graduation ceremony which was a celebration of the accomplishments of both our students and our school. To be a part of all of that was both inspiring and humbling. It is my hope that our road forward will allow us to continue to capture this same Cornerstone spirit.

Despite our success in navigating the end of the year, I am aware that many of you are experiencing much worry and anxiety about the upcoming school year. I can assure you that you are not alone in that feeling. Many of our educators, as good and experienced as they are, are feeling much the same way. What I seek to provide you with this letter is not reassurance that we have it all figured out, but that as a staff we are working diligently to ensure that our students received a high-quality education no matter what the upcoming school year brings.

As you may or may not know, last week the Governor released three options for the reopening of schools in the fall. Specific details of the plan can be found in the [“Lighting Our Way Forward”](#) document which can be viewed by following the link. The document is an exhaustive road map for safely reopening schools in three different scenarios. Scenario A consists of a full return of students. Scenario B would be a partial return of students (no more than 50% of capacity), and Scenario C would be a continued remote learning plan.

Our staff has already begun the process of planning the upcoming school year, and this guidance has provided us with an instrument to inform our planning in order to ensure the health and safety of all our students. Currently, I have a team of about 30-40 staff, parents, and board members who are all working together to lead our school through the reopening process. The first step of the planning process for our team was to engage in an extensive analysis of what is most important to our school with the commitment that we would work hard to consider how to preserve it.

What is clear from our work is that there are several priorities in our planning approach. First and foremost is providing for the safety and health of all our students. The second is preserving the strong

sense of community which everyone has always prized, and finally, we want to ensure that our students continue to receive a rigorous education.

What is far less clear at this point is exactly how we meld those three priorities into an adjusted school paradigm. The safety precautions which are required will touch every aspect of not only our school, but all North Carolina public schools. This includes, but is not limited to, arrival and dismissal, classroom instruction, lunch, recess, volunteers and visitors, facility usage, student transitions, budget, and after school activities.

It is times like these where I am so thankful that I am part of the Cornerstone community, because we have the capacity, the desire, and the talent to be able to meet our priorities and continue to thrive as a community. Since the release of the "Lighting Our Way Forward" report, we have had at least three meetings to continue the planning process with more scheduled for this week. Because we are so early in the planning process, there is not much to report from the school, but I will continue to keep our families updated as we work through the different planning iterations.

In the meantime, the next big step in this process is Governor Cooper's decision about which scenario public schools will adhere to in the fall. We anticipate that decision to be made near the end of June. I will communicate that decision forward to all our families. While this will provide the schools with more clear information about how our school will be configured in the fall, it will be far from answering all the various questions. We will continue to plan using this decision in order to develop our Return To School plan, which is due to the General Assembly by July 20, 2020.

After Cornerstone's Return To School Plan is approved, I anticipate hosting a series of meetings to provide our families and community members with more extensive answers about the path forward. Throughout this process, please keep an eye out for emails updating our planning. These communications will continue to be placed on Cornerstone's webpage for easier access for our families.

Thank you all in advance for your continued commitment and support for Cornerstone! The only way through this process is as a community. I cannot wait for the day when we will all safely return to our building to celebrate our resilience. Please stay safe throughout the summer months.

Sincerely,



Joe Caraher
Director