

# DISTRICT MONTHLY MESSAGE



## District Monthly Message - August 2020

Aug 12 2020

### Message From Dr. Scarsella, Superintendent

Dear Palos 118 Families,

Last Friday, I shared with you in my weekly update that our staffing shortage had hit a critical level with a number of positions still vacant for the upcoming school year. Unfortunately, this staffing shortage continues, and upon my recommendation, the Board of Education voted last night to delay the start of school until Tuesday, September 8. This delay will provide the school district additional time to interview, hire, background check, and onboard new staff members.

My decision to recommend a delay to the start of the school year was based on two factors. First, I remain committed to maximizing the number of in-person instructional days this school year. By delaying the start of school, we will add additional days of instruction at the end of the school year. It is more likely students will be back learning in-person five days a week by mid-June. Second, I believe there is still great demand from our community for in-person instruction to start the school year. The number of families selecting our remote learning only program is less than 25% of our total student population. Previous surveys indicated that nearly 70% of our families favored in-

person instruction compared to remote learning. I have no data to suggest the community's support for in-person instruction has diminished.

Our staffing shortage is not unique to our school district. Many school districts are struggling to fill recent vacancies as the school year rapidly approaches. These vacancies are a result of staff members recently retiring, resigning, requesting leaves of absences, and the need for additional staff members to support remote learning. Staffing has been and will continue to be the most difficult internal hurdle we face to opening schools safely. I am hopeful we will be able to fill these vacancies in the near term and open schools under our previously announced hybrid model plan on September 8.

The Board of Education had a robust conversation on starting school on time with a remote-only program rather than delaying the start of school for in-person instruction. As one board member stressed, there is no right or wrong answer when it comes to reopening schools during an unpredictable global pandemic. We simply must do our best with the information we have at the time and remain committed to returning students to the classroom. I understand that delaying the school year is yet again another sacrifice we are asking families to make. I wish we didn't have to do so but, we cannot safely reopen schools without adequate staffing.

At last night's meeting, I was asked if there would be any further delays in reopening schools. There will not be any further delays. If we cannot adequately staff our schools by September 8, we will be forced to open with a remote-only program. Our remote-only program will look nothing like it did last spring, and I'll be sharing more information this Friday regarding how it will be different compared to last school year. Again, I remain hopeful we will start school with in-person instruction, but during this pandemic, there is no guarantee. Flexibility and frustration are two words that will dominate our continuing conversations regarding reopening.

A copy of the amended calendar will be emailed to families this Friday with my weekly update. Some important dates are below.

### **Amended Calendar Important Dates:**

- September 7 is Labor Day – No School
- September 8 is the first day of school for Group A
- September 9 is a remote-only day for all students
- September 10 is the first day of school for Group B
- October 8 is the last day for the Hybrid Model (Group A & Group B)
- October 9 is a Teacher Institute Day – No School
- October 12 is Columbus Day – No School
- October 13 is the intended full return for all students
- June 18 is the last day of school

I know some will be disappointed by the decision to delay. I'm disappointed. These difficult decisions seem to be never-ending. I remain hopeful that at some point this school year, we can return to some sense of normalcy for our students, staff, and the entire school community. I remain grateful for your continued understanding. I'll have more updates on Friday.

Warmest regards,

Dr. Anthony M. Scarsella  
Superintendent of Schools

[Arabic: الترجمة العربية](#)

[Polish: Polskie Tłumaczenie](#)