August 25, 2020

Dear Atherton Families,

As you may be aware, our Atherton Board of Education voted Monday, August 24th, 6-1 to delay the start of in-person schooling at Atherton Community Schools. Our start date has also been moved from August 31st to September 8, 2020. Students attending A.V.A. will begin school on September 14th as originally scheduled.

Over the summer, the district’s administrative team has worked on developing a safe way to bring our students back for face-to-face instruction in the midst of a global pandemic. Our teachers and staff miss their students and each other, and firmly believe that face-to-face instruction is the ideal method to teach children. We believe our face-to-face hybrid learning plan is a good plan. However, we cannot at this time ensure that we can keep students and staff safe and provide a consistent learning environment for our students. The recent release of guidance from the Genesee County Health Department makes it clear that there would be many interruptions to education because of the quarantine of teachers and students, and staffing issues would develop throughout the district. This is added to the already present anxiety about feeling responsible if even just one student or staff member became seriously ill from COVID-19, or our district was responsible for a “spreading event” within the community.

As a district, we are extremely confident in our ability to deliver a more complete and robust learning experience than was experienced in the emergency shutdown in the spring. Our staff members continue to improve delivery methods through professional development and we have purchased new online curricular tools, as well as implementing a new platform to deliver instruction. The remote learning curriculum will be far more comprehensive than what we were able to provide last spring. Students will be held accountable for learning and clearly defined expectations each day. Through these methods, our district can provide students with a quality remote learning experience with their classroom teacher. With the passing of our recent bond in August, every student will be provided with a new device in the coming weeks. Until those are available, students will be issued a device if they do not already have one.

For those students who have special needs and more intensive needs for support, staff from our programs will be working with each of our families to find out what will work best for your child going forward. We are hopeful to begin scheduled appointments for our special needs students by the end of the month.

The Board of Education and our administration will monitor the data locally and throughout the state, and work with health authorities to bring students back face-to-face instruction when it is safe and more stable to do so. We will continually evaluate the situation and if we are to change direction, we will provide families and staff with ample notice.

Sincerely,

John Ploof
Superintendent

To provide students with an educational experience that inspires a successful future.