



July 20, 2020

Good morning Charter Arts students and families,

I hope this message finds you healthy and well. We wanted to provide you with an update regarding our current return to school plans for the 20-21 school year.

At the end of the 19-20 school year, we put together a Remote Learning Team, which included core and artistic teachers, other support staff, and administrators, and we have been meeting regularly to discuss and formalize our Return to School plan for the 20-21 school year. In addition to working with our own internal team, we have been consulting with St. Luke's representatives, our local IU20, and have been staying up to date on guidance from the Pennsylvania Department of Education and the CDC. Every day we get new information and new studies that have us rethinking and reworking our plan. As every news article and TV show explains, the circumstances surrounding "returning to school" remain fluid, and we are working to stay creative given these circumstances as that is what we do best.

Our number 1 goal, as always, is to make sure that we are fulfilling our school's vision and mission while ensuring that our community stays safe and healthy. We want to come back together as a community and be with our students on campus, but we don't want to put any of our students or teachers at risk to do so.

When we sent out a survey to families earlier in June, we had 324 responses, and responses were varied - some of you wanted to come back fully in person while other families wanted a hybrid and fully remote option. However, since that initial survey, we know that COVID cases in PA have risen and cases are spiking nationally, and we know that you are having conversations in your homes about what is the best way to return to school in the fall. Personally and professionally, we are all having those same conversations.

In looking at our school building and after analyzing our current space, we know that it is not safe to bring in 100% of our students and employees at the same time in the fall and meet and maintain safe physical distancing requirements. As a regional charter school, we also have to consider that our students attend Charter Arts from 47 different sending school districts and 11 counties. This brings its own set of unique challenges regarding tracking COVID hot spots by county and transportation from various sending districts. While we want Charter Arts to be the artistic and creative hub for high school artistic education in the Lehigh Valley, we need to consider our space, curriculum, and resources to maximize student learning while taking into account our regional model and safety.

To that end, we have purchased chromebooks for every student, which we will deploy at the start of the year once they arrive. We want to ensure that all of our students can access their Charter Arts education at home without having to share devices with parents or siblings or work from their phones, which many of our students were doing last year at the end of the year. Our artistic departments are currently working to determine the safest way to engage students in their curriculum and host virtual performances and gallery

shows since we know our students want to showcase their work. Since visitors are still not allowed in the building, our fall performance line-up will include a variety of options:

- Pre-recorded performances in our various performance spaces, including the theatre, Black Box, and classrooms) during the day when students are in school to record
- Recorded performances from students homes, in their living room, basement, etc.
- Live performances via YouTube, Google Meet, Zoom, or other platform depending on the needs of the event

Last year, for example, our dancers were dancing and submitting videos from their driveways, basements, and backyards, and our virtual songwriters cafes and “lodge readings” had better attendance virtually than if the events had been held in person. While these are not the performances we are used to, they are becoming part of our new “normal”, and it is exciting to see how we can contribute to the art world in new ways. We employ super creative people who are dedicated to artistic education and to supporting our students whether they are learning in school or from home. Additionally, this exposes all of us to new instructional technology and new ways to showcase our student work with the world through social media and the internet. It is very exciting to think of the opportunities this will create to expand Charter Arts reach far beyond the Lehigh Valley.

Like many school districts locally and nationally, we are still considering a variety of options for returning in the fall and have yet to finalize our plan as we are still evaluating all available guidance, but we wanted to provide you with an update on what will be safest for our return. We know that all students and employees that come to the building will be required to wear masks unless they have a medical exemption, per state governmental requirements, in which case students and employees that qualify for an exemption will still be required to wear a face shield. And to make sure that everyone in our building is protected, we have already purchased one reusable mask and one face shield for all students and employees.

Regarding our instructional plan, we are still exploring a variety of options, two of which are outlined below.

OPTION 1: Universal, Synchronous Remote Learning & In-Person Elements As Needed

In-person elements of a mostly remote plan that are currently under consideration would include:

- Access to high quality artistic education, coursework, and community with teachers and classes as regularly scheduled but held virtually through via Google Meet/Zoom
- Attendance required and taken at the beginning of class and student participation and engagement will be required to meet our high expectations
- Providing space for artistic performance preparation on campus as needed and as scheduled; utilization of media lab, the stage, and practice space for various coursework
- Opportunities to sign out equipment or technology as needed to support the curriculum
- Providing a supervised safe place on campus to complete remote learning for students whose home situation or wifi is not conducive to learning
- In-person small group (15 students or fewer) instruction for highest need students and students in need of accommodations based on discussions with IEP/504 teams
- Individual and small group social/emotional learning support, postsecondary planning, and academic check-ins/mentoring as needed

OPTION 2: Hybrid model with mixed In-Person & Remote Learning Weekly

Specifically, a Charter Arts Hybrid model would include:

- Scaffolded entry by grade the first week of school for transition purposes, class meetings, etc.
- 50% of students participate in-person on campus in regularly scheduled classes Monday and Tuesday with access to remote learning (synchronously or asynchronously) Wednesday through Friday

- 50% of students would participate in remote learning Monday through Wednesday and come to campus for in person learning on Thursday and Friday
- Students would either be divided by alphabet, grade-level, or artistic major depending on data and interest
- Access to the same high quality teachers, coursework, and education as in option 1 with two days in person to access instruction and support
- Some classes, depending on content, may still require at-home elements and performances, including, but not limited to, vocal music, brass and woodwind instruments, dance, and some hands-on elements in Production Arts
- Option 1 would still be available for families that want a fully remote option

While there are many benefits and challenges associated with each plan, we want to gather your feedback again and are looking to have 100% participation in this family survey. We also know that a lot can still happen between now and when school is supposed to begin on August 31st. Your continued input will help us finalize our schedule and plan accordingly. And no matter which plan we implement for quarter one, we will be evaluating the implementation of our plan and making adjustments as needed.

Please complete the [SURVEY](#) so that we can continue to reflect on your feedback regarding these plans. This survey will be open this week only and will close on Friday, July 24th. This is not a final commitment survey, but we will be using this information to finalize our Health and Safety Plan. Once that plan is board approved, we will share the details with families in a more robust presentation in early August and ask for your final commitment at that time.

We appreciate your flexibility as we continue to work collaboratively, creatively, and around the clock to ensure that we provide the most cutting edge, artistic education we can in our new COVID virtual world.

We thank you in advance for your feedback, and we look forward to working with you in new and very exciting ways in the coming year.

Best,
Carise Comstock, Ed.D.
Superintendent and CEO