



Dear Residents,

“Great leaders are almost always great simplifiers, who can cut through argument, debate, and doubt, to offer a solution everybody can understand” - [General Colin Powell](#)

We, the undersigned school leaders in rural Michigan, know without hesitation that the best learning option for our students is also the simplest; they must return to school in the fall. Our young people must be educated to the maximum extent possible with their peers, teachers, and school support personnel.

This notion is not presented on a whim, rather it is supported by research, collective experience, and common sense. On the research side, Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs Theory essentially tells us that humans must be physically and psychologically safe and feel a sense of belonging before they are able to successfully engage in higher-order thinking activities as necessitated by the academic learning process. Through the collective experience of educators, our schools have changed over time to address those needs in many ways including: the development of social-emotional supports, numerous specialized learning programs for core academics, the arts, career and technical education, special education programming for our most vulnerable children, and extracurricular activities. Common sense dictates that given the lack of reliable high-speed internet connectivity, and the correspondingly limited access to peers, specially trained school personnel, and critical equipment and learning aids, it is simply not advisable for the majority of students that attend the schools in our area to receive instruction and other support services through distance learning models when other options are available.

These facts are not being highlighted to devalue online learning or alternative educational methodologies. Nor are they intended to be critical of the decision to learn at home to “flatten the curve” at the onset of Covid19 in our great state. On the contrary, these facts are presented moving ahead to first, advocate for implementing solutions that are best for our students and communities and second, to increase awareness of the inequities that exist across our state regarding internet connectivity for students, particularly students in poverty, who live and attend school in rural areas.

As school superintendents, student and staff safety and student learning continue to be the top priorities for all of us. We are driven to help our young people succeed. As a result, we are preparing for the possibility of periods of learning at home during the upcoming school year. With that stated, it is our intention to collaborate with health officials so that we can return to school in the fall. This is the best option for our young people. In addition, we call for action to address the connectivity issues that are a basic fact of life in rural areas and to provide equal access to the internet for our students.

Sincerely,

Dr. Jason Jeffrey, West Shore Educational Service District
Dr. Tom Langdon, Walkerville Public Schools
Tim Reeves, Shelby Public Schools
Mark Platt, Hart Public Schools
Dr. Scott Karaptian, Pentwater Public Schools
Jason Kennedy, Ludington Area Schools
Jeff Mount, Mason County Central Schools
Jamie Bandstra, Gateway to Success Academy
Paul Shoup, Mason County Eastern Schools
Rick Heitmeyer, Baldwin Community Schools