



Message From Dr. Otott

Hello PCSD Community,

You may have seen a photo of a crowded high school hallway that is circulating widely on social media and has been reported by several national news media outlets. The photo appears to be from North Paulding High School. Some in the news media and some individuals on social media are taking this photo and using it without context to criticize our school reopening efforts. Hopefully, I can provide some of the missing context. Under the COVID-19 protocols we have adopted, class changes that look like this may happen, especially at a high school with more than 2,000 students. Keep in mind that this situation complies with Georgia Department of Education's Path to Recovery for K-12 Schools (developed in coordination with the Georgia Department of Public Health) where they recommend schools limit the congregation of students during transitions to the "extent practicable." Class changes at the high school level are a challenge when maintaining a specific schedule. It is an area we are continuing to work on in this new environment to find practicable ways to further limit students from congregating. Students are in this hallway environment for just a brief period as they move to their next class. I have attached a document from the Department of Public Health that states exposure to COVID-19 occurs after "Being within 6 feet of a sick person with COVID-19 for about 15 minutes."

That is the context I wanted to provide. Now, with that said, there is no question that the photo does not look good. I can understand if your first reaction was one of concern. Our district is comprised of 33 schools serving more than 30,000 students in-person and virtually. We anticipated that adjustments may need to be made, so on July 24th we notified the community that we would be shortening the first week of school. Identifying needed adjustments and making improvements is one of the reasons why that decision was made. Students learning under in-person instruction are in school Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday of this week, but will be learning remotely on Thursday and Friday so that all of our schools can step back and assess how things are going so far.

One area where we have received a good deal of feedback is mask use in our schools. Wearing a mask is a personal choice and there is no practical way to enforce a mandate to wear them. What we will do is continue to strongly encourage all students and staff to wear masks.

It is unfortunate that in this age of instant communication these types of issues can escalate so quickly without sufficient context. In situations like this, my job is to make sure you have the facts and then see what I can do to address the situation to support our students and staff. I look forward to working with our school staffs to make those adjustments on Thursday and Friday while your students are learning remotely. Thank you for your patience and support as we all adapt to this new learning model and make needed adjustments.

Brian Otott

Superintendent

Paulding County School District
