

WHITEHALL CENTRAL SCHOOL DISTRICT
PO Box 29, 87 Buckley Road, Whitehall, New York 12887-3633
Whitehall – Birthplace of the U. S. Navy – www.railroaders.net

John Godfrey
Jr-Sr High School Interim Principal
518 499-1770
jgodfrey@railroaders.net

Patrick M. Dee
Superintendent of Schools
518 499-1772
pdee@railroaders.net

Judy Gould
Elementary School Principal
518 499-0330
jgould@railroaders.net

Brianne K. Hazelton
Coordinator of Special Education
518 499-1771
bhazelton@railroaders.net

Kate DuBois
School Business Manager
518 499-0346
kdubois@railroaders.net

To the Entire Whitehall Community:

May 20, 2020

I understand how difficult this time has been for all of our students and families, but especially our seniors. In my nearly thirty years in education, I have never experienced anything like what we are experiencing now. When all of this began in the beginning of March, we were all hopeful and anticipating that we would be able to return to school prior to the end of the school year. Now that all school campuses have been closed for the remainder of the year, we have had to make decisions based on the currently executed Executive Orders of the Governor, as well as the guidelines from the State Education Department, and the expert advice of our local, state, and federal Departments of Health.

Currently, all school campuses are closed which includes all school activities. The Governor's Executive Order calls for the "cancellation of all non-essential gatherings of individuals of any size for any reason (e.g. parties, celebrations, games, meetings, or other social events)". Those restrictions may be adjusted in the coming weeks, but we know that campuses are closed and school events are cancelled through the end of the school year.

In regard to Graduation for the Class of 2020, please understand that the district did not and would not provide a press-release regarding graduation to the media in advance of communicating with families. Unfortunately, the timing was poor in that as a region, the superintendents met with the Departments of Health on Monday May 18th. That same evening the district had its monthly Board of Education Meeting at which I needed to share the information that was presented by the Departments of Health from Warren, Washington and Saratoga Counties with our Board of Education. We were informed that the departments of health "would not and could not support or condone in-person graduations". Coupled with the Governor's current Executive Orders it would force the district to hold a virtual graduation on June 26th.

An article, which was posted to the Whitehall Times Facebook site on Tuesday, neglected to mention that the information that I shared at the Board of Education Meeting Monday evening in regard to a "Virtual Ceremony" is preliminary and based on the CURRENT guidance received just that morning. I also shared during that meeting that the district ADDITIONALLY has plans in

place for an in-person, socially distanced graduation ceremony should the Governor's office and the Department of Health provide the districts with the latitude to move forward with such an event. Clearly, this would be our desire, however as a district we cannot knowingly and willingly violate state laws or Executive Orders issued by the Governor's office. I recognize that there is question in regard to "how and why" other districts have shared their plans to host an in-person graduation. The simple answer is that based on ALL the current information and guidance that has been provided to date; it is not permissible.


Lastly, I shared that in 5 weeks things may be different. We are all hoping that as businesses begin to reopen allowing people to get back to work, it will be done in a way that still protects the public. We know that the Governor's office is working on a plan to phase-in the opening of NYS in four phases which began on May 15th. Washington County is considered part of the Capital Region for reopening purposes, which currently has over 3,900 cases of the virus. Schools and entertainment venues are listed in phase four of the reopening plan. In the Governor's projections, each phase-in step may take up to at least two weeks, but could be longer depending on whether or not cases increase or decline. Please let me reiterate that the district HAS PLANS IN PLACE for an IN-PERSON, socially distanced graduation. Specific plans will be shared with the community as we get closer to June 26.

I have been in education since 1992 and I have attended graduation ceremonies every year since I started. I know how important this time is for students and families and I feel terrible for the seniors in both high school and college who will be missing out on traditional graduation ceremonies. That being said, schools are charged with providing a safe and healthy environment for all students and staff.

I understand that this current information is not what everyone had hoped for. Please know that whether the ceremony remains "Virtual" or if we can host an "In Person" graduation, our plans will be a special celebration of all of our seniors' accomplishments. I wish things were different and I truly understand how hard this is for everyone, but we will continue to follow any new guidance to remain in compliance with state guidelines. Rest assured, if we are permitted to host an in-person ceremony, We Will!

Please realize that we all want the same thing; to recognize the hard work of our seniors of the class of 2020. We will continue to be in contact with the Governor's office and the Departments of Health and share any and all changes that may be forthcoming.

Best,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Patrick Dee', written over a large, stylized circular flourish.

Patrick Dee
Superintendent of Schools