

WHITEHALL CENTRAL SCHOOL DISTRICT
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Good morning,

October 21, 2020

On August 24, 2020 the Whitehall Community suffered a catastrophic loss when a rogue storm dropped nearly 7" of water on the Whitehall Community. As I have previously shared, the Whitehall High School suffered extensive water damage that was caused by back-up of water and sewer into our building. Our engineers have stated that this was created by a failure of our numerous outside and roof drains ability to accept the inordinate amount of water that fell during the storm. On August 27, I shared a letter with the community indicating that we hoped to have students at the High School, back into a clean and safe environment during the second marking period. I also shared that I would update the community as we knew more and if the time frame for our return would need to be extended. Today, I am providing that information.

For nearly 3 weeks following the storm, the district contracted with Service Master, a water remediation company, to evacuate the water from the building and dry-out the inside of the school to the best of their ability. Since the storm, the district has been working very closely with our contractors who have had to remove a significant amount of construction work that had been completed as part of our summer 2020 construction project, as it had gotten wet and could not be salvaged. Additionally, the district has contracted with Intertek-PSI to complete environmental testing and identify areas of the building that have hazardous materials that were disturbed as a result of the water damage, and to identify the spaces in the building that have developed mold growth due to the water damage.

On October 19th the District Buildings and Grounds Committee met with our Clerk of the Works, Architects as well as Environmental Specialist to receive an update on the extent of the damage as well as the timeframe necessary to complete the remaining work. We have discovered that there will be extensive abatement of asbestos floor tile that has been disturbed by water infiltration as well mitigation of mold growth that has developed inside of many of the facilities walls. All of these affected areas will then require extensive restoration and replacement work when the abatement/mitigation is completed.

The district initiated the Abatement and mitigation work several weeks ago. Unfortunately, due to the extensive area of the building that was impacted, it is anticipated that the abatement work will last into the month of March. The remediation and repair process consist of containment barriers being set up by wing, with continuous air monitoring conducted during

the abatement. When the abatement is complete in a wing, additional air quality testing must be completed and “pass” before the containment barriers can be removed and the area can be turned over to the contractors for the necessary restoration work.

From a health and wellness standpoint, we cannot have students safely in the building as Abatement work progresses. As such, we hope to be able to have a partial reopening of the High School facility at some point during March. If there is a possibility of reopening, even partially any sooner; we certainly will.

While I certainly recognize that this is not the news that any of us were hoping for; it is imperative that we protect the health and safety of our students and staff. We simply cannot permit students in the facility until it is deemed a safe and healthy building by our environmental consultants.

Lastly, we continue to struggle with our insurance carrier NYSIR (New York School Insurance Reciprocal). We will continue to aggressively seek the coverage to which the school is entitled and we, as well as our experts firmly believe we possess. The Board of Education has provided approval to Litigate the matter in a Court of Law if necessary. The district is currently in process of interviewing law firms that specialize in insurance matters to do so. The Whitehall Central School District will NOT stand by and allow the insurance carrier to dictate what they will cover based upon their narrow interpretation of the policy. In the meantime, the district is developing contingency plans to utilize reserves, fund balance as well as building project dollars to complete the work necessary to allow our students to return to school.

As always, I appreciate your continued understanding as we work together to overcome this significant community challenge.

In solidarity,



Patrick Dee

Superintendent of Schools