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December 21, 2020

Dear UCESC Parents, Family Members and Staff:

Over the past few weeks, I have carefully and cautiously monitored the rising activity levels of the COVID-19 pandemic in Union County with hopeful optimism that our schools and programs would remain open for classroom-based instruction through the end of December, 2020.

Earlier today, I learned that three additional members of the UCESC family tested positive for COVID-19 over the weekend. After consulting with the Westfield and Scotch Plains Health Offices, I placed a total of eighteen students and staff members on self-quarantine due to close contact. These numbers reflect only a small representation of the growing list of students and staff who are absent from school and work each day due to unfortunate COVID-related circumstances.

The first and foremost duty of a Superintendent is to ensure the physical and emotional well-being of the students and staff in the district. I feel that I am not fulfilling that tremendous responsibility if I allow students to return to schools where I cannot be completely assured in advance that sufficient staff are present to provide adequate supervision and meaningful instruction to students.

For these reasons, I advised the UCESC Board of Directors of my recommendation for all Commission schools, programs and departments to shift to full-time remote learning effective Tuesday, December 22, 2020 and remain in this format until Friday, January 15, 2021.

I understand this announcement is disappointing and apologize for the last-minute notification. Given that Union County is currently experiencing rates of COVID-19 positivity and transmission that rank among the highest in New Jersey, I am quite confident my decision represents the best interests of safety for students and staff alike during these challenging and stressful times.

Please know that we remain fully committed to providing traditional classroom-based instruction. Our administrators, teachers, therapists, paraprofessionals, and support staff share this belief and have put forth extraordinary effort to ensure that our schools remained open over the past months. I commend each for their dedication and commitment to educating the children we serve despite their own fears, anxieties, and hardships related to the pandemic.

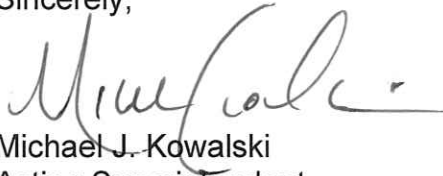
While we need to be flexible and open to unanticipated changes, I remain steadfast in the goal of resuming hybrid in-person instruction as originally planned on Tuesday, January 19, 2021 assuming public health data deems it a responsible decision.

In closing, I ask that we all remember one important fact – an end to the COVID-19 pandemic is within reach and we will continue moving towards that goal together.

I wish everyone a happy holiday season and healthy new year.

Thank you for your continued support.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Michael J. Kowalski".

Michael J. Kowalski
Acting Superintendent