July 30, 2020

Dear YCSD Families and Staff,

This evening the School Board convened to discuss the superintendent’s recommendation for the start of the 2020-21 school year. On behalf of the Board, I want to begin this letter by thanking Dr. Shandor and his staff for their steadfast leadership over the last six months, through the Grafton Complex fire and a worldwide pandemic. Neither my fellow board members nor I would have imagined we would face two major crises for our schools within such a short time period.

I also want to thank every member of Team YCSD, as you have faced overwhelming challenges and found creative solutions in order to support our students and families. Finally, I want to thank our students, parents and community members for sharing your thoughts, ideas and questions with the Board over the last weeks and months. We have considered all your feedback and based our decision tonight on our community’s wishes, what is safest for our students and staff based on guidance from local health experts, and the ability to properly staff our schools to allow in-person instruction.

As a result, the Board has voted to begin the school year in the Remote Model of the Flexible Framework developed by the division. We have further directed the superintendent to develop plans for bringing students back to school before the end of the first nine weeks, based on metrics identified by the Virginia Department of Health and the Virginia Department of Education, as well as YCSD operational capacity metrics. Priority will be given to our most vulnerable learners, which includes students within the following student groups, student with disabilities, English Learners, and students in grades PreK-3. Students in other grade levels will follow.

We know our students need to be in school for their academic and social wellbeing. We also know many families depend on schools being open so parents can work and students can have access to the many services we provide and this decision may create hardships for some. However, I do not believe it is worth the risk to the students and staff or our greater community to forge ahead with in-person school at this time.

Our community has divided opinions on this matter, but our utmost priority must be safety. It is my hope that our community will come together in a constructive and productive manner to support our students, families and schools. In order to have a successful school year, we must work together.

Thank you,

James E. Richardson
Chair, York County School Board