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Dear Fellow Lakewood Community Members,

If you watched the superintendent interviews or read the article in the Lakewood News, you have some sense of my background, commitment to public education, and excitement regarding the opportunity to serve of the communities that make up the Lakewood Public Schools as superintendent. For those that have not, my name is Steve Skalka, my wife Stacy and I have two grown children, Quinn and Emily, and I come to Lakewood with twenty-seven years' experience as a school administrator, seven as a superintendent. As we plan to start a new school year unlike any other, I am grateful to be able to draw upon my years of experience and numerous contacts I have made throughout the state.

With regard to plans for the new school year, let me start by saying that we recognize that 1) in-person instruction, teachers and students interacting with one another in the classroom, is the best way to learn, 2) though some things may be outside our control, we are committed to do everything we can to maximize in-person instruction, and 3) we are similarly committed to deliver in-person instruction in a manner that minimizes the health risk for staff and students to the extent possible.

So, what's the plan? On June 30th, the Michigan Return to School Roadmap was released. The document contains various requirements and recommendations based on what phase of the Michigan Safe Start Plan in which the district is determined to be. District administrators have been working with one another, fellow districts in the Ionia ISD, and with representatives of the Ionia Department of Health, but before we can develop a plan that meets the needs of our staff, students, and community, we need to know what they think about the many different aspects of returning to school safely.

We are currently finalizing a survey that will be made available to parents Wednesday. It is critically important that we receive responses from ALL families so that we can not only plan for instruction, but other services like transportation and food service.

Though we are not planning to send staff a survey, I will reach out to staff via a staff e-mail asking them to share their thoughts and concerns regarding returning to school to their building principals or directly to me and maintain regular contact with their association leadership.

Finally, if you are a member or the Lakewood community who is currently not the parent of a school-aged student nor a member of the LPS staff, I welcome you reaching out to me with any of your thoughts or concerns regarding our schools opening in late August. You can reach me at 616-374-8043 or at stevenskalka@lakewoodps.org.

Together, we will not only meet, but exceed, the requirements of the Michigan Return to School Roadmap and deliver to the Board of Education for approval a plan that reflects the academic, social, and health needs of our staff and students by the August 15th deadline.

With Viking Pride,

Steven C. Skalka