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Dear SOMSD Family,

We hope this correspondence finds you and your loved ones healthy and safe. As we shared late last week, a facility walkthrough and review of some of our schools resulted in some concerning discoveries as it relates to our ventilation upgrades.

We were unable to provide more specificity at the time because a detailed investigation of the concerns was needed. After a thorough review, our investigation revealed that while much work towards our reopening was completed (removal of carpet, installation of hand sanitizer stations, mitigation signage, plexiglass installation, etc.) an important component was not completed despite having been verified as successfully finalized. We are aware that sharing this information may create additional concerns among our staff/families, however, in this case, we believe transparency is vital in earning our community's confidence. We are unable to provide details related to personnel matters; however, please know that we hold our administration to the highest level of accountability and integrity, as we view ourselves as servant leaders to our community. We also preface this message by acknowledging responsibility in our chain of command including oversight that ultimately ends with me as the Chief School Administrator/Superintendent of Schools.

Specifically, during our October 19, Board of Education meeting, after verification from our Facilities Department lead, we shared that our univents (unit-ventilation boxes in each classroom) had been updated with filters with a Merv 16 rating. Unfortunately, our extensive inspection and investigation revealed that this was simply not true. Filters were not installed as had been reported throughout all District classrooms. In fact, the vendor was not contacted until after verification paperwork was submitted to the District. In order to prepare for students/staff to return to our buildings, every univent (approximately 1000) will need to be reviewed and reassessed to ensure all units have been updated; additionally, the univents are only capable of using a filter with a maximum Merv 8 rating.

We have had extensive conversations with our vendor and have been informed that the filters are inexpensive and can be quickly installed once received. However, as you can imagine, the filters that we seek are in great demand. Our vendor believes we can complete our project, which also includes repairing motors and blowers in each univent as needed, in between six-to-eight weeks. Please remember that the repair/replacement of our HVAC systems is a part of our planned district-wide construction improvement project.

To that end, the estimated timing of this work resets our potential reopening, which will now take place on approximately January 19. The preparation timeline for this reopening will also include action steps that ensure increased monitoring and communication of our progress. Given the upcoming holidays and the difficulties many are facing (and will face due to staff quarantines), this date also allows for personal quarantining for any in our school community who travel for the winter break without the need for substitutes and the accompanying disruption to educational services.

We will also be closing our return to school parental survey and relaunching it at a date closer to our opening (prior to winter break). All parents will have the opportunity to resubmit their hybrid/virtual preference at a time much closer to our reopening. Additionally, our Academic Town Hall events will be rescheduled to December.

As we have stated repeatedly, the health and safety of our students and staff is our highest priority, and we are prepared to be nimble during a time that is more fluid than ever. Thank you for your patience and understanding.

Educationally yours

Dr. Ronald G. Taylor