



To: Parents, Students, and Las Cruces Public Schools Community

From: Joseph Flores, K-12 Fine Arts Content Specialist

Date: July 2, 2020

Re: Summer Marching Band Camps and Competitive Season Cancellation

The COVID-19 pandemic has drastically affected us all in ways none of us thought we would ever witness in our lifetime. As you well know, Las Cruces Public Schools and all schools across our country have been working non-stop to imagine and reimagine systems and methods to safely deliver high quality and effective instruction to students. The many unknowns related to the virus itself and the necessary limitations that have been required to slow its spread have made planning for reopening exceptionally challenging.

You have likely heard in the news the concern regarding the spread of the virus during certain activities. Understandably, performing arts activities have come under scrutiny. In response, a coalition of arts organizations has commissioned a large study of aerosol transmission during performing arts activities that includes music, theatre, and dance. The results of the study are due to be published on July 10th. National and state organizations have wisely advised against and have temporarily prohibited group performing arts activities until the scientific data comes available. The results of the study will ultimately dictate how performing arts will return and function for the remainder of the pandemic.

As you know, high school summer marching band is the first performing arts activity on our calendar and typically begins the third week of July. The marching band directors of our comprehensive high schools and I have held multiple conversations to discuss the various ways to proceed with summer band, without playing instruments, while keeping students safe. Creating multiple safety plans in response to an infinite number of possible data outcomes has been exceedingly difficult. We have concluded that the best option is to wait for the results of the study. It should be noted that the July 10th data release date will not be the actual date we can move forward. Once the data is released, the New Mexico Public Education Department (NMPED) and New Mexico Activities Association (NMAA) will need time to review the information before providing official guidance which will ultimately take additional time. This series of necessary steps will leave very little time for LCPS and its marching band directors to adequately formulate an effective and safe plan, make preparations, and inform students and families about summer band in a timely manner. The safety of our students is our greatest concern and with that in mind we have unanimously agreed to cancel all summer band camp activities.

Furthermore, we have also agreed to forego the competitive marching season this year for several reasons. First, it is impossible to guess the timeline of the pandemic and how long and to what degree we will be required to social distance for the good of all. Competitive marching band requires students to practice drill, play their instruments, travel, and perform - none of which are currently allowed by NMPED and NMAA. Second, competitive marching band is expensive. While we dearly love the activity, it would not be reasonable to expect the school to fund and parents to fundraise for music arrangements, drill design, choreography, uniforms, props, and bussing knowing full well that the opportunity to rehearse, travel, and perform as a full group is severely limited and even then could be completely canceled at a moment's notice due to exposure, spikes in infection, and event cancellation. Sadly, at the time of this letter some competitions have already been cancelled.

Lastly, I would like to be very clear and say that with positive data from the study and permission from both NMPED and NMAA, it will be our intent to provide some form of marching band experience to our students in support of our school communities. That form may not look like what we are accustomed to, but trust that our exceptional directors will carefully plan and do their very best to provide an experience that is educational, meaningful, and most importantly safe for students. No matter the format, this year our marching bands will still be filled with incredible students who are committed to excellence and achieving the highest levels of musicianship just like in years past. Las Cruces Public Schools has and will continue to be well known for the quality of its students and music programs. For them, we choose to error on the side of caution and make this difficult decision now rather than later. We truly hope that you understand our reasoning.