

Dancing fundraiser takes on new look due to COVID -19 pandemic

BY CINDE INGRAM
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HIGH POINT — COVID-19 has added new challenges in preparation for Communities in Schools of High Point's signature fundraiser, Dancing with the High Point Stars.

Ten community members were wearing masks recently as they practiced with professional dance partners to

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perform in the 11th annual event set for Saturday, Feb. 27, at the High Point Country Club. Dancers were given the option of a touchless dance, a normal full-touch dance or a

hybrid, said Tommy C. Walls Jr., executive director of CIS.

"The dancer has chosen whatever (option) they are comfortable with," Walls said. "Before they practice, they have the temperature checks and hand sanitizing — every 15 minutes they do that to make sure that all the

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dancers are safe. We tried to take all precautions as much as possible with this event.”

Walls stressed that CIS of High Point and its partners, Fred Astaire Dance Studios of Greensboro and the High Point Country Club, have safety measures in place and will comply with COVID-19 recommended guidelines to keep dancers, program participants and attendees safe.

“We are well aware of the governor’s orders, and we are trying to abide by those 100% in conjunction with the country club’s procedures that they have outlined for us,” Walls said. “We’re not looking to have a large crowd or a ton of people.”

Some sponsors and audience members will tune in virtually as livestreaming is planned for hub locations and home watch parties, said Catherine Niebauer, CIS director

of development and community relations.

“We’re letting our sponsors determine their comfort level with viewing and capacity,” Niebauer said. “Some of our sponsor levels are ‘watch now’ and some of them are ‘watch later.’ ”

Some sponsors will have live links, and others will get a recording of the video, Walls said.

The Fred Astaire studio staff also is working with CIS to prepare video introductions for each dancer rather than the previous method of passing microphones around for people to introduce themselves.

As a nationally accredited dropout prevention program, CIS has a more than 30-year history of addressing risk factors to help prevent students from dropping out of school. CIS each year graduates 99-100% of its students, all of whom are at high-risk for dropping out.

COVID-19 precautions that resulted in remote learning for many students are likely to have an impact on graduation rates, Walls said.

"Quite naturally our dropout rate will probably go up only because we've got parents who are struggling with getting their kids online," Walls said. "We offer programs and tutoring at our admin office, which we've been blessed with this year. We're serving ... about 100 students through this."

As one of five nonprofits operating student enrichment centers, CIS of High Point received 26 laptop computers from the Foundation for a Healthy High Point. Due to the pandemic, the Guilford County Board of Education decided to start the 2020-21 school year with remote learning, which many families found challenging. With 67% of county students living in low-income households, some students lack access to devices or internet connections.

"We did a poll of those students who were probably at-risk or truant because of their inability to access the internet," Walls said. "We're paying for some of our parents' internet service for the next three months or six months, depending on their bill package. The parents were proud and grateful we were able to assist them in that."

Providing transportation to get students to the CIS facility was one of its unexpected expenses, Niebauer said.

"We want to feed them while they're here and we want to provide mentoring with regular consistency," she said. "We're very proud that a lot of this is weekly so our kids are continuing to plug in with caring adults that are encouraging and motivating them."

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