

BOARD NOTES:

July 21, 2020, Special Board Meeting:

Board Statement: Board President Mr. Adelbert Spaan thanked the school community for their participation in the surveys and for submitting insightful comments and feedback. The Back to School Task Force reviewed all the data and comments, recognizing an emerging theme indicating families' desire for an "opt-out" remote learning option. In response, they are exploring every possible way to create a workable program for students who might choose that route. While that process continues, we are still invested in engaging with the community and fine tuning the plan to get back to school. Understanding that there is no solution that will please everyone, and knowing that many questions still remain to be answered, District 29 continues to tweak the plan's framework in order to customize it to our community's needs. We ask that families remain patient and flexible, and understand the community's role in the success of this endeavor. We are thankful for such an engaged community.

Board Open Discussion: Superintendent Dr. Ed Stange welcomed 4 guests to the meeting that The Board had asked to attend so as to ask questions that might help guide decision making. They were:

- Dr. Rob Citronberg, Infectious Disease Specialist and community member
- Dr. Matt Primack, President of Advocate Condell Medical Center and community member
- Dr. Dan Friedman, licensed clinical psychologist and community member
- Dr. Ed Dunkelblau, Director of The Institute for Emotionally Intelligent Learning, licensed clinical psychologist, and nationally known speaker on the topics of social-emotional intelligence

Dr. Stange reported that he had received dozens of emails and phone calls from community members in advance of the meeting reflecting a broad spectrum of opinions. He walked the Board through the results of the latest survey, which saw an increase in the amount of families that desire a fully remote option for their student(s). In an effort to find a way to meet everyone's needs, the survey comments were sorted in order to find emerging themes. Generally, those themes were:

- How can the District provide an "opt-out" remote provision families could choose instead of in-person?
- How can the District clarify provisions related to health monitoring?
- How can the District clearly articulate protocol and expectations regarding PPE?
- How can the District clearly articulate the cleaning protocols, procedures, and materials?
- How can the District support both teachers and students as they transition physically and emotionally to school?
- How can the District delineate the response to both general illnesses and confirmed COVID cases?
- How can the District ensure that teachers and staff are appropriately trained in any new protocols?
- How can the District ensure that social distancing is maximized during in-person learning?

Dr. Stange opened the floor to our expert guests to answer questions from the board. A synopsis of each of their comments is as follows:

Dr. Rob Citronberg:

- There is no right answer in creating a back-to-school plan, rather districts should create individualized, customized plans that serve their communities
- Temperature checks are not necessarily the most reliable source of information, as a student's temperature could fluctuate based on outside air temps and physical activity levels at the time temps are taken. It is better to do temperature checks 20 minutes after entry to school for a more accurate reading. Temperature checks can also serve as a deterrent to parents who might be tempted to send their child to school ill

- A 6-foot social distance is reasonable, but the data shows that that is not a hard and fast guideline. Depending on conditions and masks, that distance could decrease or increase. Coupled with masks, however, it is a very effective guideline
- Universal masking allows you to decrease the distance between desks, as masks are a very effective device in preventing viral spread
- Typical disinfectants are very effective, with special attention to high-touch areas
- Unfortunately, there is not enough data available for us to learn much from any other country's experiences with opening schools
- Cloth masks are hard to determine if they are effective, as materials and fit differ so widely. Any cloth or homemade mask should meet the CDC's stringent guidelines in order to be effective
- No child should be sent to school displaying any respiratory symptoms, even if they are not COVID related
- Data shows that the cohort model can be very effective in preventing and/or containing viral spread

Dr. Matt Primack:

- Medical Level 1 masks are perfectly fine to wear to school. Use them for one or two days and then dispose of them. Cloth masks should meet the CDC guidelines. Fit is key to the ability of a mask to work correctly. Use the "finger test" to make sure your mask fits: Run your finger around all of the edges of your mask. If there are any gaps, your mask has a decreased ability to protect you and others around you
- If you get a COVID test, you should assume you are positive until proven otherwise. Meaning anyone who is tested should remain at home until receiving a negative result
- When doing temperature checks, a measure of 100 degrees or over is technically a fever. However, it is necessary to let the kids settle for 20 minutes before taking temp checks so that your reading is more accurate. A more effective procedure would involve daily health questions each family would have to answer, involving emergence of symptoms and possible opportunities for exposure. This will involve the community being able to self-regulate
- Eating lunch will no doubt be one of the largest opportunities for risk of exposure, as students will be without masks. One way to greatly mitigate this risk is to use the desk shields during lunchtime.

Dr. Ed Dunkelblau:

- In order to think creatively, and be flexible and effective, teachers will need to feel safe.
- The uncertainty of our situation causes significant anxiety, but try not to be reactive to that anxiety.
- No real learning can happen until we attend to the social-emotional needs of students and staff
- How to interact with students is a top worry of our teachers, but there is room to be creative about those interactions. Can each student display a "mood meter" on their desk shield indicating their daily state-of-mind? Can a moment of handwashing provide an opportunity for brief interaction?
- The most important step is decreasing adult anxiety so that kids can in turn feel safe and secure
- Parents should start to ease their children back in to the idea of school gradually, understanding that it will be very different from what they have known before
- Parent/Guardian education and preparation is also very important in order to support student experience

Dr. Dan Friedman:

- Before school, find ways that kids can see their teachers and friends in masks. It will provide an opportunity for kids to create a frame of reference around their relationships, and be one less thing they have to navigate on the first few days of school
- It would be helpful if each student wore a button picture of their face so kids can immediately recognize their friends and not have to struggle with doubt or hesitation
- It will be important for all the adults in our students' lives to help them ease in to this new experience that no one can really predict.

Dr. Stange thanked our expert guests, and thanked the SREA (teacher union) for their partnership in the planning process. The Task Force is now working at the building level in order to titrate the plan, and will meet again as a whole next week with new findings and suggestions.

Public Comment: District parent Mr. Rodney Watt addressed the Board, voicing his desire for a more detailed plan in order to decide on whether to send his children in-person or to choose the remote option. More specifics would be helpful, followed by time to make the decision. District parent Mr. Charlie Pick requested the District reduce the daily density of the student body and offer a remote learning option, and expressed concern that the masking and social distancing requirements will become tiresome for students and teachers, and impossible to enforce effectively. District parent Mr. Shawn O’Leary gave the Board some statistics regarding current IL positivity rates in comparison to other states, daily case rates, and hospitalization rates. Noting that the data shows that 10-19 year-olds can spread the virus at the same rate as adults, he recommended the Board offer a remote learning option. Read aloud at the meeting was a letter from teacher Mrs. Christine Keopraseuth urging the District to start in Phase 1 with remote learning, then moving through each subsequent phase slowly without pre-prescribed dates attached, and requesting that we engage in daily temperature checks. Read aloud was a letter from teacher Mrs. Laurie Barry suggesting that the District ask all parents/guardians, students, and teachers to self-quarantine 2 weeks before school starts, in addition to after any occurring travel. Read aloud was an anonymously submitted letter from a teacher asking the District to start the year in Phase 1 remote learning, which would be more robust than it was in the spring. Read aloud was a letter from teacher Mrs. Alyssa Baldwin urging the District to start the year in Phase 1 remote learning, which would be much improved from what it was in the spring.

The Board continued to discuss the Task Force’s work, thanking them for the herculean effort they have made toward meeting everyone’s needs as much as they can. The Board urged the community to understand how individual behavior might affect the outcome of efforts to open school safely and effectively, and asked that families prepare to quarantine for 2 weeks before the start of school and curb any non-essential activities. Efforts to create a back-to-school guide are underway that would be a reference for families as they seek answers to specific questions regarding procedures and protocols. An opportunity for families to commit to an “opt-out” remote learning option will be forthcoming as general details of the program are formulated.

Official meeting minutes will be posted on the website following their approval at the August 18, 2020, Regular Board meeting.