

February 8, 2021

Dear Parents and Guardians,

At the February 4th School Board meeting I addressed questions regarding our current model of instruction, considerations for changes, and health guidelines in Delaware County. I have included my remarks from the meeting along with the [video](#). We are also sharing the information about COVID testing and vaccinations that were presented in the Mid-Year Review and Future Planning by Ms. Jennifer Saksa and Ms. Nicole Battestelli. The video segment can be found [here](#).

February 4, 2021 Board Meeting: Superintendent Remarks

This evening I'd like to make some comments about our current model of instruction, as well as our thoughts about a path forward. We all value the importance of full-time, in-person instruction, and we are all eager for a return to normalcy. As we look ahead to the next portion of the school year, I want to address some points and provide some clarity:

Unless the CCHD changes its guidance, we will not unilaterally make any changes to our requirements for social distancing. Counties in which public schools are open five full days for all students operate under a different health authority. No Delaware County public school district is operating five full days a week for all students. As has been acknowledged previously, our administration and Board are not medical experts or authorities. We continue to abide by the health authority. Their social distance guidance of 6 feet of separation aligns with guidance from the state and also from Children's Hospital of Philadelphia. Following this guidance enables our staff to be safe and to feel safe and that is important.

The superintendents of Delaware County have asked CCHD to examine transmission rates in schools in other counties where social distancing guidelines are less than 6 feet. And to examine the same data if available for private and parochial schools where social distancing may be less than 6 feet. We are aware of numerous news stories and reports calling for a return to in-person education, however many of these, including one from the CDC, are aimed at schools which are currently operating 100% virtually. Within these reports, the mitigation strategies are stressed and among those strategies is still a call for 6 feet of distancing.

The absence of a full-time in-person model is truly taking its toll on our children and their families. We all, families and educators share concerns about the social and emotional

well being of our children. And we all wish to return students to more in-person learning. One of the ways in which we can provide more in-person instructional time is by converting virtual Fridays to an alternating in-person day. This is something we're currently reviewing and exploring. We hope to begin with the secondary level the first week of March.

We have given consideration to a transition in our current instructional model to five in-person half days for students, instead of our current Monday/Wednesday or

Tuesday/Thursday model. What we know is that a change to five half-days does not provide for any increase in teacher/student in-person learning time for the overwhelming majority of our elementary students. It also removes the supervised opportunities for play and recess as well as removing the most familiar part of their schooling, a full day with teachers and peers. The half-day model does not decrease the amount of time the majority of students are learning at home. Such a change to the schedule must be guided by the measure of its instructional value.

We have sought input from our educational professionals and their responses identify valid pros as well as valid cons to making a move to half days. Just as many compelling reasons were expressed for making a change as well as maintaining the current schedule. There is no consensus among the educational professional staff. Given the current student performance data, which we'll hear a bit more about this evening, I can not conclude there is a compelling educational or instructional benefit to making this change at this time.

While there could be some benefits, as there are with any model, we have no way of ensuring that those benefits outweigh the negative impact of making such a change. This is particularly true when the alternative solution does not increase the amount of in-person learning time and contains many unknowns.

Additionally, we are mindful of the scheduling challenges such a change will present to some families including issues such as child care along with our inability to assure we can maintain the maximum number of students in the AM/PM cohorts, based on parents' scheduling needs. We are still limited in the number of students we can socially distance in the classrooms.

Vaccine:

Last month I asked the community to advocate on behalf of educators for access to the vaccine. Thank you to those who reached out in support of our district employees. We thank the board for their advocacy in passing the resolution which was sent to all legislators. Vaccine distribution in our county has lacked any degree of organization and is progressing slowly. It has been extremely disappointing, to say the least. We believe vaccinations for educators are a critical step towards a way through this pandemic. This week I reached out to the President and CEO of both CHOP and Main Line Health System who have each assured me they would like to do all they can to help us attain vaccines for our staff - however, they, too, are short. We will keep our community updated as we learn more.

COVID Testing:

Our district, like many others in the tri-county area, has partnered with CHOP and the Chester County Health Department to offer Rapid Antigen Testing in our district through Project ACE-IT. Project ACE-IT is a public health intervention aimed at reducing the risk of the spread of COVID-19 within schools. The program takes a dual-pronged approach to detecting COVID-19 in people participating in or supporting in-person learning through both assurance and symptomatic testing. Our staff will hear more next week about the opportunity to voluntarily participate in regular testing and we hope to begin the program for staff on February 19th. The program also involves testing individuals (staff and students) who present symptomatic during the school day. Communication will be shared with families this month.

As always, please remember to practice social distancing, wear a mask, and wash your hands.

Sincerely,
Maureen Reusche Ed.D.
Superintendent