

March 16, 2021: School Reopening Community Task Force Meeting 4

Attendees:

Alexander Wolff, Alexandra Drinkwine, Cheri Hardial, Cheryl Champ, Christina Viggiano, Erin Ginsburg, Farid Johnson, Gail Sider, Jackie De Angelis, James Hricay, Janet Hoynes, Jeannine Carr, Jessica Waters, Jessyka Calzolaio, John Condon, John Sebalos, Julia Chung, Kevin Ritchie, Kristen Burke, Kusum Mathews, Laura Hendrie, Leah Tahbaz, Lisa Arbelaez, Lynn Sabia, Maria Thompson, Mark Berkowitz, Mark Finegan, Rachel Pixley, Scott Brown, Sean Llewellyn, Stephanie Otero, Susan Gilbert, Tara Weishaupl, Theresa Pignone, Thomas Callahan, Tiffany Hebert, Tracy Breen

Meeting Opening

- Dr. Champ reviewed what happened since March 9th Task Force meeting:
 - Preliminary reopening plan presented to the BOE on March 10th
 - Parent Sessions with Dr. Champ held on March 11th
 - Commitment Survey fielded and due by March 17th at noon
- Dr. Champ reviewed meeting objectives:
 - Review planning/policy changes that happened after March 9th Task Force
 - Talk about new research that showed no difference in in-school transmission or volume of quarantines at 3 ft of distance versus 6 ft
 - Move to breakout sessions in the areas of elementary and secondary lunch, mental health support, virtual learning support and metrics/surveillance testing
- Dr. Champ noted that the next step was developing a report that could be presented to BOE at next week's meeting on 3/24
 - TBD whether or not we need another Task Force meeting on 3/23

Planning and Policy Changes

- NYS: Fully vaccinated or positive for Covid in last 90 days do not need to quarantine; This is now applicable in schools and helps with "stability" of staff when there is a case in school
- NYS: People no longer required to quarantine upon return NY after they travel out of state; This not applicable in schools yet due to this guidance not yet adopted by department of health, so the school still requires students to quarantine or test out. Confirmation of this will be forthcoming.
- It was suggested that these changes be communicated clearly by the school district
- MS/HS return dates are TBD, and phase-back likely to start in April:
 - Cases still happening
 - Phase-back metrics need to be finalized
 - Need to know percent of each MS/HS grade that want to return to more FTIP learning to understand what can be offered

- Since we cannot fit 100% of students in every day at 3 feet of distance, we may have to do modified hybrid such as 4 days in, 2 days virtual
- The plan may differ by MS and HS
- Satellite classrooms are not viable at this point since classrooms capacity is already consider “over-utilized” (e.g., no free classrooms)
- 8th grade will likely return first due to Regents exam requirements
 - A question was asked about Regents referred to as “high stakes” by Dr. Champ and they are because all of the 8th grade taking the science exam and about half of the 8th grade is taking the math exam; Scores are currently part of final grades (district policy that will be discussed further) and go on transcripts (state policy)
 - It was noted that NYS grades 3-8 assessments are happening and it needs to be determined what to do with those who opt-out of testing; They may need to stay home for exam portion of the day due to space constraints.
- Mitigation update
 - Everything is ordered
 - No vendor responses to tent RFPs (4 sent); District will work with vendors for quotes outside of the bidding process
 - Surveillance testing participation is going well at elementary school with appointments booked into April; Secondary school participation is still challenging so the district is making appointments for students and telling them when to report (participation is still voluntary, however)
- Staff vaccination rates
 - Reporting is voluntary and district has only heard from 60% of staff as of late
 - County DOH is communicating their information on staff vaccinations to NYS on a weekly basis
- Scheduling
 - At the elementary schools, open office hours will be moved to end of day so that it can better meet academic needs of virtual students
- Question about elementary seating: Is it OK that students are facing each other vs. facing one direction
 - Dr. Breen, Dr. Matthews and Dr. Hebert concurred that the mitigation benefit of all facing forward is minimal and providing more space for students is most important
 - It was reiterated by Dr. Breen that masks, and separation while masks down and eating were the 2 key mitigation requirements
 - Jeannine Carr, Farid Johnson and Laura Hendrie noted that the configuration seems safe with the barriers, and gives more floor space
 - It was noted that some students should have better fitting masks

Work Groups

- The Task Force broke into the work groups for ~40 minutes and regrouped at 6:20 to discuss key takeaways and next steps
- Key takeaways:

- Secondary lunch: MS all set and HS biggest concern; considering max seating in HS gym, as well as bringing in available bleachers in the district, plus asking town businesses to put out their tables and umbrellas
- Elementary lunch: all set
- Mental health and wellness: for kids hesitant to return, it was discussed to allow tours and phase-back period
- In-person learning: Notes and recommendations will be included in the final report
- Metrics and surveillance testing: Various metrics suggested for monitoring and to be added to the website for transparency. County data is the best available. Internal trends can be measured against county trends to determine any problematic changes. Vaccination rates and surveillance testing results are of interest to the community.