

Task Force Minutes

May 4, 2021 Meeting (5pm – 6pm)

Attendees:

Introduction:

- Dr. Champ kicked off the meeting wishing the teachers a Happy Teacher Appreciation Week and thanking the task force for their work so far
- Dr. Champ reviewed the meeting objectives:
 - Finalize report
 - Discuss next steps for fall reopening planning

Update on reopening (from Principals with full group discussion):

- Overall, principals report that the return to full-time/more full-time in-person (grades 9-11) instruction is going well noting that students and teachers are happy and thriving
- Hutch has been using teacher's aides (from Iona and Fordham) to help assist with virtual instruction
- At the high school, there is a great feeling of happiness about the Olympics and the robust "welcome back" for the 12th grade. One student noted to Dr. Berkowitz, which he thinks is representative of many: less strain on their eyes, growing confidence about the return, and happiness for more interaction.
 - Grades 9-11 **may** be able to all come back 5 days soon, since enough overflow space (e.g., like the library) seems to be available, however, this is still to be confirmed with the faculty
- **Current challenges:**
 - Lunch:
 - Siwanoy is concerned about "enough" parent volunteers for lunch
 - Prospect is able to successfully use the hallways for lunch
 - Hutch uses staggered eating in classroom and it is an "exercise in patience" for kids to have to wait to eat
 - Colonial is successfully using MS/HS fields for lunch and recess
 - Some elementary kids do not have time to finish eating
 - Very dense hallways at the MS/HS
 - The need to quarantine whole elementary classrooms due to eating in classrooms, and movement around the classroom
- **Challenges for fall:**
 - At the MS/HS – space is the primary concern, as they are most constrained and the fully virtual students will likely be back; particularly lunch space

- At the elementary level- there is little concern about overall space but lunch continues to be a concern
- Virtual learning, the way it is happening now without dedicated teachers, is not sustainable if a virtual program needs to continue in September
- NYS guidance continues to lag behind the CDC:
 - For example, people still need to wear masks outside while on campus
 - Guidance for eating 3 ft apart instead of 6 ft would be game changer

Report Approval:

- The task force thinks it looks great with minor suggestions to be more definitive where we can (e.g., Clearly state “Here is the plan for High School lunch..”)
- Final report will be submitted to BOE at May 5th meeting

Barriers

- Barriers are no longer required and are not viewed as an impactful form of virus mitigation by CDC/NYS
- District polled 100+ teachers and:
 - 19% - Want barriers to continue
 - 28% - Want barriers only when students are facing each other
 - 53% - Think barriers are not needed
- There were many comments on this:
 - Generally, the group believes the use of barriers needs to end promptly, but requires change management due to the “comfort” that they provide to some
 - Dr. Hebert said we should follow the science and not use barriers
 - Dr. Breen said Mt. Sinai has removed all of their barriers and that they do not lower the risk of Covid. Additionally, Dr. Breen noted that teachers would be better served with PPE such as a face shield
 - Mark Finegan recommended that we wait until end of school year to stop using barriers to be respectful of teachers who have undergone a lot of change already and for those teachers who find comfort in them; Some concurred with this
 - Teachers commented that barriers:
 - Are not serving any purpose for the students
 - Are dirty/germy
 - Continue to restrict vision
 - May instill fear since we keep telling students to stay apart, use a barrier, etc., and is counter to focusing on their emotional health
 - Are used for group work, so if they are removed, teachers need new guidance

Teacher appreciation/recognition

- Erin Ginsberg wrote a teacher/staff “Thank you” letter for Pelham Examiner from the Task Force to be submitted this week
- The Task Force can reach out to Erin and Kristen if they want help plan end of year teacher recognition activities

Fall Planning

- District does not think they will need remote teachers but have Covid stimulus funds (\$800K) in case
- If families choose to stay home: they can use home-bound services for medical issues; or parents can take child out of district for home school
- We are hoping to “return to normal”
 - Vaccinations may go to 12+ years-old soon, and BEPT consortium looking into a pop-up vaccine site
 - Perhaps with more vaccinations, distancing requirements will further lighten
- We should not expect any state guidance until July
- We will take a “Plan for the worst, hope for best” approach:
 - At elementary: good on class space, need additional lunch solutions
 - At MS/HS: class space may be an issue, need additional lunch solutions
 - If all virtual required, we can explore BEPT consortium/BOCES options
 - Hiring:
 - Remote teachers (if needed)
 - Permanent substitutes
 - Contact tracers (if needed)
 - The hope is to have “no cameras” in classrooms next year
- Task Force asked to join fall work groups:
 - Elementary space
 - Secondary space
 - Elementary virtual
 - Secondary virtual