

Covid Oversight Committee
November 10, 2021

Attendees

Lisa Marie Arbelaez, Kristen Burke, Thomas Callahan, Jeannine Carr, Cheryl Champ, John Condon, Frances Corelli, Kelly Crotty, Jackie De Angelis, Jen DeFazio, Mark Finegan, Trisha Fitzgerald, Rachael Garcia, Bridget Gates, Tiffany Hebert, Laura Hendrie, James Hricay, Farid Johnson, Christine Lavin, Jason Lindley, Sean Llewellyn, Julia Martin, Vincent Mazzaro, Michael Owen-Michaane, Lynn Sabia, Gail Sider, Christophe Choulet

Introduction

Dr. Champ opened the meeting by facilitating introductions. Committee members include:

- Dr. Michael Owen-Michaane and Vincent Mazzaro (BOE members)
- A mix of district faculty, administration and parents
- A mix of returning Covid Task Force members and new members
- 4 medical doctors
- Bridget Gates – the district's Covid coordinator

Updates

Dr. Champ provided a Covid update

Vaccinations

- 92% of teachers and 91% of staff are vaccinated; this is in-line with Westchester County; we are a highly vaccinated county and school district
- The district applied for a vaccine pop-up to support ages 5-11 vaccinations; there is a high number of parents interested in this (550 responded to a survey), and the district is waiting on notification from the county DOH if we are selected
 - Logistics of a pop-up are being discussed – either centrally located at the HS or, perhaps the Hutch gym; a bigger space is needed because parents will be coming with students for vaccination

Surveillance Testing

- While there was only 1 positive case through Halloween, there were 4 positives at Siwanoy in this week's surveillance testing sample; While likely there was contact among the cases outside of school, the possibility of in-school spread is being evaluated so that any needed adjustments to mitigation strategies by classroom are addressed
- Unvaccinated teachers and staff, as well as high risk athletes are required to test weekly in the surveillance program, and the district seeks to test at least 250 people per week. 1027 students have testing consent forms on file, although less than that participate each week
- The district surveillance testing program is PCR (e.g., not antigen like last year)

General

- The BOE requested that the district prioritize in-person instruction
- The district has hired additional staff to:
 - 2 psychologists – 1 elementary, 1 secondary
 - 4 academic interventionists - all elementary
- Dr. Champ noted that it is taking longer for students to settle into good school routines this year, as well as an uptick in stress and anxiety

Quarantine Learning

- It is going smoothly at the secondary levels: there are fewer quarantines because many are vaccinated; they are already using Google Classroom so quarantined students go there for their work; “passive” class livestream is possible if requested
- It’s more challenging at the elementary level: the lessons for quarantined students require some revisions; teachers are checking in daily with quarantined students via Google Meet and this requires some in-person class coverage
- The teachers ask that parents have patience and flexibility during quarantine learning

Advocacy

- Getting and waiting for PCR results for Covid symptoms before returning to school causes a learning loss, so the potential for onsite PCR testing was discussed
 - Since the surveillance testing program is only on Mondays, it is not a viable option for onsite PCR testing
 - The district cannot start their own program because we do not have an appropriately certified lab
 - The district would have to partner with someone local, or potentially with other school districts
 - The district likely does not have Covid money for this because it has been spent on additional staff (reconciliation in progress)
- The district is advocating for:
 - Test to stay in school if exposed (and not vaccinated yet)
 - Allowing antigen-based test results for Covid symptoms check instead of PCR
 - A science based metric for removing the mask requirement indoors (e.g., vaccination rate plus case rate metric)
 - Updated quarantine guidance to align with and changes in masking

Closing

- Dr. Champ closed the meeting indicating that the committee would meet on an as needed basis (versus the frequency and scheduled nature of the Reopening Task Force)
- Dr. Champ thanked everyone for their participation, especially the faculty and staff who have worked tirelessly through the pandemic