



# BOARD BRIEFS

Authored by the Davis School District Community Relations Department

## District changes COVID-19 case management State-issued order allows schools to move to remote learning

**H**ow the Davis School District and other districts manage high cases of COVID-19 has changed temporarily.

District Assistant Superintendent John Zurbuchen told members of the Board of Education during its Tuesday meeting that an order from Utah State Gov. Spencer Cox and other state leaders establishes a process for schools to move to up to four days of remote learning if they exceed the threshold of COVID-19 cases. That threshold is established as 30 cases for schools of less than 1,500 students and 2 % for schools above 1,500 students.

“The reason that you would go to remote is that you make the choice that the risks related to in-person learning outweigh the risks to in-person instruction,” Zurbuchen said. “So we have so much disease in the building that it’s better to have a time off. We can slow down the spread.”

Zurbuchen said the order also suspended the Test to Stay program through Jan. 28. Upcoming legislation is likely to establish new protocols, he said.

Until that new legislation passes, Zurbuchen asked board members to consider reiterating their authorization for the superintendency to make emergency decisions for COVID-19. The board voted unanimously to allow the superintendency to make those day-by-day decisions without

calling an emergency board meeting each time.

Zurbuchen said the process for the next two weeks is as outlined:

- Case counts will continue to be calculated and shared by the Davis County Health Department each night.
- Schools that reach the threshold will be contacted that night.
- Parents and school faculty and staff will be notified the school is moving to remote learning and will be given the date of return.
- Students will attend school in-person the next day preparatory to moving the following day to remote learning. This gives staff and parents time to make proper arrangements.
- Students will continue on remote learning for three to four days.
- The District’s dashboard will be reset to zero cases on the return date.

Board members noted that other districts are closing the entire district and asked about the decision to only close by school.

Zurbuchen said many of the district’s schools are not near the threshold. The intent is to address where there is an outbreak, rather than impact education unnecessarily.

## Employees to receive stipend for additional work during pandemic

**T**he Board of Education of the Davis School District unanimously approved a one-time stipend Tuesday during the business portion of the board meeting.

All Davis School District employees will receive a \$500 stipend in response to the hardships faced by educators and staff during the COVID-19 pandemic. The stipend is being funded through the reserve fund, which includes some CARES funding.

Board Member Gordon Eckersley

said he appreciated that the district was going to be able to offer the stipend to employees.

“When I first heard we were going to have to go to remote learning, my first concern was for our staff,” Eckersley said. “Right away that means an increased amount of work, hours and hours of work to prepare to do that. But there’s nothing else you can do.”

Board Member Julie Tanner suggested there might be other things that the district can do as well, includ-

ing putting off trainings.

Superintendent Reid Newey said the district is doing multiple things to give staff preparation time and the resources they need as more is asked of them.

“Nothing we can do at this time is enough for any of us, I don’t think in society,” Superintendent Reid Newey said, adding that there is an increased demand on time and a lot of stress among staff. “We’re trying to relieve as much of that as possible.”

Employees will receive the stipend in their February paycheck.

## Mental health programs helping students and staff

**S**tudents and staff are seeing the benefits of additional opportunities in the district aimed at helping mental health.

“What you have done for our children and families has been unparalleled,” Assistant Superintendent John Zurbuchen told Davis School District Board of Education members during Tuesday’s meeting. “Your commitment to mental health is not normal for most boards across this nation. Over the past three years, you’ve supported social emotional learning and stemming from that opportunity, provided more family service workers across our system.”

Now all 62 elementary schools in the district have family service workers. In the last year, they have referred more than 400 families to mental health and community resources.

“Without those family service workers in those schools, there are families that would never have been able to get those resources,” said District Student and Family Resources Director Brad Christensen.

Board President John Robison asked if family service workers in elementary schools also help older siblings

in junior or high school.

“We want to maintain a continuum of service with the entire family, so we make sure to serve the family at all levels,” said Christensen.

The district has also added more integrative educational therapists, school counselors, resource facilitators and group sessions led by licensed clinicians.

“We are lucky to provide these services to our schools ... providing more full-time counselors for critical referrals, one-on-one responses and running groups to help with emotional regulation, mindful strategies and anti-bullying,” said Christensen.

“They are doing a comprehensive service for students school wide, individually and in classrooms. We have excellent people who are invested in children’s health and our educator’s well-being,” he said.

In other workshop business, board members learned:

- Current interest rates will allow the district to re-fund the 2013 issued bonds in full, giving taxpayers a 12.8 percent savings.

## Social emotional learning initiative ongoing in district

**T**he district-wide focus on social emotional learning (SEL) is helping students and staff members every day as it becomes an integral part of learning.

“Social emotional learning helps to focus on student and adult well-being, creating a foundation for achieving personal goals,” said District Social and Emotional Learning Director Kathleen Chronister. “That is why it is everywhere, all day. It’s not a program, it’s not an add on, it’s really for everyone. Social emotional learning skills help students and adults examine their own feelings, thoughts, manage stress, collaborate with colleagues, navigate different perspectives and make caring choices.”

The initiative that began in

July of 2019 came at a critical time for staff and students in the Davis School District.

“Little did we know how important adult SEL skills would be needed as we plunged into the COVID-19 pandemic in March of 2020 and navigated through uncharted educational waters with school closures and remote learning,” Chronister said.

This year the district is focusing on building relationships.

“Brain research has shown that we think and learn best when we have supportive relationships or we feel a sense of belonging and have the opportunity to develop and practice SEL and cognitive skills across that context,” said Chronister.

“Also, SEL supports academic learning, and one important

outcome is that it builds skills that boost academic achievement. It gives students the opportunity to learn and build on their unique talents, abilities, perspectives and experiences,” she said.

Going forward, the district has implemented a pilot program in conjunction with the Utah State Board of Education that focuses on early warning systems contributing to academic failure, is working with First Lady Abby Cox for the Show Up for Teachers education conference to be held in July and is planning to create an SEL parent advisory to include parent input about SEL in their local school community.

The district also plans to hold an SEL Day on March 11 to focus on celebrating together.