

April 2, 2021

Dear BSD Parents and Guardians,

We hope you all had a great, restful Spring Break. We have enjoyed our first week back with a full-day hybrid schedule. There have been a lot of positives throughout the District and it has been a great week. After being off-site for a year, students are getting adjusted to being on-site. Students have shown some anxiety and uncertainty this week, but it gets better each day.

During Spring Break, the Ready School Safe Learners (RSSL) guidance was updated to coincide with the CDC's updated guidance for schools. The CDC's guidance released on March 19th, states that three feet of distance between students, in combination with other health and safety measures like mask-wearing and hand washing/sanitizing, is sufficient in places where community transmission of COVID-19 is low. That was a change from the previous requirement of six feet.

As soon as this new guidance was released, our district began discussing how this impacts our current in-person hybrid model. While it may seem that the revised guidance should have an immediate impact on how we are approaching our hybrid model, it does not. I would like to share a few challenges we face with another major pivot of our in-person learning plan.

- It is still required that students remain six feet apart when masks cannot be worn, such as when they are eating. We are looking into alternative solutions to lunch time at the middle and elementary schools if all students were on-site daily.
- "Close contact" for the purposes of contact tracing is still defined as less than six feet by the CDC. If we have a positive case in the district it could lead to larger groups of students being quarantined and exposed if we adjust to less than six feet of social distancing as our standard.
- We are still required to serve both in-person and online learning. We have dedicated 9 of our teaching staff at the elementary and middle schools to online learning only. This creates a class size issue if students who are in-person are on-site daily.
- If we follow the new guidance, many students will switch teachers and schedules again at the elementary and middle schools. Changing teachers at the lower grade levels could have a negative impact on our younger students.
- We are exploring options at the high school that will allow us to have classes for all students on-site 5 days a week and simulcast most classes for the students in CDL.

Each school presents a different set of challenges with scheduling, planning safety protocols, and other logistical items. I can assure you that the staff at each school is meeting and having discussions. Not discussions about how we cannot do this, but discussions about solutions. We may not be able to achieve all students in K-12 on-site 5 days a week, but we are definitely going to find solutions to increasing on-site time for students. With the change from six feet to three feet in certain situations, we now have the ability to plan during the summer and have a normal(ish) school year in 2021-22. This new guidance is a major change and a much brighter outlook for next school year. A year where students in grades K-12 have the option to be on-site, 5 days a week.

Thank you for your understanding and patience.

Jeff Leo
Superintendent
Banks School District