

SCHOOL BOARD MEMO #20-21-45

DATE: 10/12/20

TO: Members of the West Fargo School Board

FROM: District Administration

RE: Return to Learn Plan Revision

FOCUS: Administration is requesting a revision to the Return to Learn (R2L) Plan that would allow for more students onsite when Cass County is yellow.

On July 14, Governor Burgum released the ND K-12 Smart Restart guidance for fall 2020 school reopening. This guidance made it very clear that district decisions need to be made with input from families, staff, local health care providers, and local health departments. District leaders created a structure that involved input from families, teachers, support staff, administrators, city leaders, community partners, health care providers, and Fargo Cass Public Health (FCPH) and the ND Department of Health (ND DoH). More than 45 meetings have taken place since July 14, and the document before the Board today represents hundreds of hours of work and collaboration. In addition, the district administration is in the process of collecting stakeholder feedback from families and staff through PowerSchool and surveys.

Since the release of our return to learn plan on July 31, guidance has changed as new information and science regarding COVID-19 has been made available. Most recently, the ND Healthy Return to Learning Team released the following guidance to districts:

ND Healthy Return to Learning Team Recommendations on School Opening:

Foundation

1. *Children and their parents are best served when schools are open full time.*
 - a. *Full-time school is the optimal learning environment for most students.*
 - b. *A full-time school schedule is consistent with many parents' work schedules.*
 - c. *Foodservice programs tailored to meet the nutritional needs of students are well established.*
 - d. *Children and families are struggling due to lack of access to school support services provided within the school.*
2. *Children infected with COVID-19 have a low risk of severe illness. Based on our current understanding, kids younger than age 10 may not become infected with COVID-19 as easily as adults. However, the risk for children transmitting the virus to other populations of the community is still a concern.*

3. *Mask wearing is similar to vaccinating populations. The more people who are masked or vaccinated, the higher benefit to the whole population.*
4. *Children receiving optimal educational opportunities at school is equivalent to, or perhaps more important than, the function of other businesses that have been deemed “essential.”*
5. *The current hybrid system incorporated by many local school boards as a mitigation strategy has been compromised by children participating in off-day school/childcare programs. Hybrid models have at times created more transmissible moments as children move from care point to care point. This may have increased their exposure risk as well as compromised many parents’ ability to work outside of the home due to unsatisfied childcare needs.*
6. *Hybrid models are not the best long-term model for K-12’s primary mission of academic growth for all students and are no longer considered useful in the mitigation of community spread of the virus under current circumstances.*
 - a. *Schools should be cautious not to prolong the use of a model that, by its very design, predisposes students to fall further behind.*
 - b. *Many students have likely already fallen behind in their learning due to school closures last spring, with disproportionately negative effects on students who are economically disadvantaged, living in transition, or who have a disability, are English Learners, etc.*

In addition to the guidance from the ND DoH, Essentia Health has also provided the following information:

Doctors from Essentia Health have advised administrators to consider is cohorting (or forming “pods”). Cohorting forms groups of students, and sometimes teachers or staff, that stay together throughout the school day to minimize exposure for students, teachers, and staff across the school environment.

Ideally, students and staff within a cohort would only have physical proximity with others in the same cohort. This practice may help prevent the spread of SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19, by limiting cross-over of students, teachers, and staff to the extent possible, thus:

- *decreasing opportunities for exposure to or transmission of SARS-CoV-2.*
- *facilitating more efficient contact tracing in the event of a positive case.*
- *allowing for targeted testing, quarantine, and isolation of a single cohort instead of school-wide measures in the event of a positive case or cluster of cases.*

Cohorting can be done as part of a traditional model with all students attending school in-person, on a full-time basis, or as part of a of a hybrid school model (i.e., students attending in-person school on an alternating schedule). Different strategies may be needed for elementary, middle, and high schools. Cohorting is a commonly used strategy in many elementary schools, in which students have the same teacher and classmates during the entire day and often for the entire school year. Implementation of this strategy varies, depending on setting and resources. For

example, schools may keep cohorts together in one classroom, and have teachers rotate between cohorts.

ND DOH has outlined a phased approach for returning to fulltime face to face learning. Schools should bring PK-5 back first, followed by grades 6-8 and then 9-12 based on most current data. Two incubation periods or 28 days is a reasonable timeframe to monitor for any uptick in positive cases.

The District has defined policies to identify vulnerable children, teachers, and staff at risk for severe COVID-19 and provide accommodations for online education (virtual program already available) and other service provision in a lower risk environment.

If the Board moves to modify the R2L plan to allow for up to 100% of students to be onsite when Cass County is in Blue, Green, and Yellow, District Administration will proceed with the following critical understandings:

1. Changes to the instructional model will not occur without approval from public health experts, including FCPH, ND DoH, and Essentia Health.
2. District Administration will work collaboratively with building level administration and the R2L Advisory Committee, which includes educators and families, to define a timeline and plan for phasing in instructional groups and/or grade bands, starting with PK-5.
3. Building level administration will work collaboratively with site-based leadership teams, ensuring communication and input into the planning.
4. District and building leadership teams will explore personalization of learning and flexible scheduling.
5. Once families and staff are notified of a change to the learning model, they will have a minimum of two weeks to prepare for the transition.

District administration is committed to ensuring safety for our students and staff and will continue to adhere to the guidance we receive from our health care partners, as we have done since the beginning of the pandemic.

Administrative Recommendation: Administration is requesting the revision of the R2L plan as presented for the 2020-2021 school year.

Sample Motion: I move to approve of the R2L plan revisions as presented for the 2020-2021 school year in accordance with the administrative recommendation.

PHASES

The following phases will be used to define the community risk level associated with COVID-19. These phases align with the color-coded guidance in the ND Smart Restart Plan. Each level is reported to schools by the NDDoH after rigorous testing and assessment of cases in the community. [ND Smart Restart Plan](#)

Each week, a team comprised of representatives from Fargo Cass Public Health and Essentia Health will meet with the District Executive Team, School Board President, and Lead School Nurse to determine the status of individual schools and the district. Data reviewed by this team will be the 14-day rolling average of cases, hospitalization rate, death rate, and the number of symptomatic individuals sent home in the district. Numbers more specific to what is occurring in Cass County will assist the district in determining the appropriate level of stringency of onsite education and work for students and staff.

	Instructional Model	Students	Staff	Masks	Physical Distancing (6 feet)
Blue	New Normal	Onsite	Onsite	Not needed	Not needed
Green	Hybrid	Both onsite and offsite	Both onsite and offsite	Yes, in common spaces and when physical distancing is not possible	Yes
Yellow	Hybrid	Both onsite and offsite	Both onsite and offsite	Yes, in common spaces and when physical distancing is not possible	Yes
Orange	Distance Learning	Both onsite and offsite	Both onsite and offsite	Yes, at all times	Yes
Red	Distance Learning	100% off site	100% off site	N/A	N/A



OPERATIONAL GUIDANCE

Orange: Significant transmission and high risk of exposure.	
Instructional Model	•Distance Learning
Priorities:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Students learn from home, with exception of small groups (less than 10%) for intervention or special programming. •Staff allowed onsite with masks and physical distancing.
Districtwide Practices:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Online instruction will be used district wide in all courses at all grade levels. •Instruction will focus on essential learning targets. •Attendance and academic progress will be expected. •Grading policies will not be suspended. •Implement internet access (wifi) hot spots around schools, to support distance learning for those that may not have it in their homes. •Local food distribution may be implemented by food service program.
Schools:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Closed to the general public except by special arrangement with the district office. •Small group meetings or instruction may be allowed, particularly for special needs students or academic interventions.
Classrooms:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Students will engage in learning at the home. •Students will be expected to engage in learning opportunities online (SeeSaw/Schoology). •Teachers are expected to make direct student/family contact at least xxxx time per week.
Extracurricular Activities:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Guidance and directives from the NDHSAA and other governing boards will be used to guide these activities. •Athletic and other extra/co-curricular activities likely suspended.
Communications:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Clear communication about academic expectations and grading shared with students and families. •Share technology support resources for parents. •Student/family support hot-line opened.
Red: Critical risk with the highest disease and level of significant and uncontrolled community transmission	
Instructional Model	•Distance Learning for all students and staff.



OPERATIONAL GUIDANCE

Yellow: Heightened exposure risk.	
Instructional Model	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •A Hybrid model - both offsite and onsite
Priorities:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Ensure students and staff who are symptomatic stay at home. •Implement reasonable accommodations to mitigate school-wide and community spread. •Educate students, staff, and families on hand washing, physical distancing, and profile information on how the disease is spread.
Districtwide Practices:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Physical distancing in all spaces at all times. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Distancing on a school bus will be unachievable; families transport children. •Buildings routinely cleaned and disinfected according to CDC guidelines. Special focus on high touch/traffic areas. •Hand washing integrated multiple times throughout the day. •Hand sanitizer available throughout each building. •Staff and students wear masks in common spaces and in the classroom; masks can be removed when in workspace with physical distancing for up to 15 minutes. •Based on identified COVID cases of students and staff targeted closures may be implemented (class, grade, department, etc) while other schools remain open to educate students in person. •Implement technology support line. •Instruction will focus on essential learning targets. •Attendance and academic progress will be expected. •Grading policies will not be suspended. •Implement internet access (wifi) hot spots around schools, to support distance learning for those that may not have it in their homes. •Local food distribution may be implemented by food service program.
Schools:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Protective measures will be maintained in office spaces. •School events, assemblies, and gatherings will be cancelled. •No access to campus for visitors or rentals.
Classrooms:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Students may be attending school on a hybrid schedule. •Students will be expected to engage in learning opportunities online using district learning management system on days they are not in school. •Teachers are expected to make direct student/family contact at least twice per week. •Students will not share materials and supplies when in school. •Desks arranged to allow for cohort groups and physical distancing. •Staff and students working in close proximity will be required to wear a face covering.
Common Areas:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Students will stay within their cohort throughout the day. •Schedules will be altered to reduce cohorts passing in common areas. •Lunch times and locations will be altered to reduce the number of students in the cafeteria at any one time.
Extracurricular Activities:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Guidance and directives from the NDHSAA and other governing boards will be used to guide these activities.
Communications:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Share information about how to stop the spread of COVID-19. •Share technology support resources for parents.



OPERATIONAL GUIDANCE

Green: low risk for exposure or transmission.	
Delivery Model:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Hybrid model - both offsite and onsite
Priorities:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Ensure students and staff who are symptomatic stay at home. •Implement reasonable accommodations to mitigate school-wide and community spread. •Educate students, staff, and families on hand washing, physical distancing, and profile information on how the disease is spread.
Districtwide Practices:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Physical distancing in classrooms and common spaces to the extent possible. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Distancing on a school bus will be unachievable, we encourage parents to consider alternate transportation for their child. •Buildings routinely cleaned and disinfected according to CDC guidelines. Special focus on high touch/traffic areas. •Hand washing integrated multiple times throughout the day. •Hand sanitizer available throughout each building. •Staff and students wear masks in common spaces and in the classroom; masks can be removed when in workspace with physical distancing for up to 15 minutes. •Support and train parents on use of technology tools and online curricular resources.
Schools:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Protective measures will be implemented in office spaces. •Some school events, assemblies, and gatherings may be changed or cancelled. •Access to campus for activities or rentals may be limited with new protocols.
Classrooms:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Students issued “technology” and trained on how to access online learning resources including learning management system adopted by school. •Do not share materials and supplies. •Desks arranged to allow for cohort groups and physical distancing where possible and reasonable. •Staff and students working in close proximity will be required to wear a face covering •Face shields will be available for staff at high risk.
Common Areas:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Students when moving around the building will move in cohort groups and reasonably try to limit exposure to other groups. •Schedules may be altered to reduce cohorts passing in common areas. •Lunch times and location may be altered to reduce the number of students in the cafeteria at any one time.
Extracurricular Activities:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Guidance and directives from the NDHSAA and other governing boards will be used to guide these activities.
Communications:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Share information about how to stop the spread of COVID-19.



OPERATIONAL GUIDANCE



Blue: most normal activity can resume.	
Delivery Model:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Onsite learning for all students.
Priorities:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Ensure students and staff who are symptomatic stay at home. •Implement reasonable accommodations to mitigate school-wide and community spread.
Districtwide Practices:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Buildings routinely cleaned and disinfected. •Hand washing integrated throughout the day. •Hand sanitizer available throughout each building.
Schools:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Protective measures will be implemented in office spaces.
Classrooms:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Students issued “technology” and trained on how to access online learning resources including learning management system adopted by school.
Common Areas:	
Extracurricular Activities:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Guidance and directives from the NDHSAA and other governing boards will be used to guide these activities.
Communications:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Share information about how to stop the spread of COVID-19.

