

NEWS AND NOTES

November 10, 2020

Dear SBRSD Families,

I wanted to start by sharing some good news about how the District has recently received compliments at both the Sheffield Select Board Meeting as well as at the Superintendent's Roundtable Meeting for how well SBRSD has done handling things during the pandemic, specifically the focus on safety, the development of a strong phased-in educational plan, our communication and inclusiveness, and the social emotional supports put in place for the whole school community. Also, we have received feedback from parents thanking the faculty and staff for all they are doing for the students. As expected, it is not perfect and often there is frustration for a variety of reasons including connectivity issues, worry that students are falling behind, a desire to have children back in the classroom full-time, and the concern about the potential increase in cases in parts of the state. And even with all of that, there is still a climate of understanding, appreciation, and grace. I am very proud of everyone and our continued commitment to our students and our school community!

At the request of the Commissioner, all Districts were asked to update their Reopening Plan, share the link with the state, and post it to the website. That has been completed. We will do our best to keep up with the guidance to ensure we have the most up-to-date information out there as well. Due to the speed at which things are changing – that process may take a bit longer!

In the span of a few weeks, there have been several changes to the weekly health reports and maps issued by the Department of Public Health (DPH) that we use as metrics for monitoring the virus in surrounding communities. To summarize, the overall intent is to continue to pin-point exactly where pockets of increases are in communities to better explain why they are “red” and to encourage the continuation of in-person learning even if a community is designated as red, as long as there is no evidence of COVID-19 transmission in the schools. At his press conference on Friday, the Governor encouraged more in-person learning *where feasible*. As part of the work, we will take a look at this in a collaborative and inclusive way. Based on the District's experience to date with an extremely low to a zero transmission rate, and on our collective commitment to do what is best for students when making decisions, we have begun the work of determining what is feasible and talking about a potential plan - in the event that things stay this way – to begin a phased-in return to school beginning with our youngest learners. The initial thinking is to target the middle or end of January. There are many variables to consider when contemplating the development of a Return to School Plan like the number of cases in our communities and the trend, impact bargaining obligations

with all units, the budget and increased costs of additional personnel and multiple tiers of transportation, space in the outlying schools, and use of facilities as the result of having more students back in school. We are actively working on this, and there will be much more to come as a result of this work!

On Friday, Districts were asked to participate in an urgent data collection request by the Commissioner. We completed a 37 question Structured Learning Time Survey based on our updated Reopening Plans. According to DESE, there has been a significant amount of pressure from all stakeholder groups with various viewpoints and opinions on the current educational experience for students who want this data in an effort to compare what Districts are doing across the state. Districts were also asked to be prepared to present follow-up documentation including schedules at a minimum depending on what they saw as a result of the survey. We expect there will be more information from the state on the outcome in the near future.

Please make sure that our school community members are staying safe and well. It is very easy to forget with so much going on and with doing whatever we can to take care of others in these challenging times. Just a gentle reminder for all - if someone in your house does not feel well, **Please STAY HOME!** Below is the full list of symptoms for which you should consider for monitoring yourself, and for which caregivers should use to monitor their children:

- Fever (100.0° Fahrenheit or higher), chills, or shaking chills (CDC has lowered the temperature from 100.4 to 100.0)
- Cough (not due to other known cause, such as chronic cough)
- Difficulty breathing or shortness of breath
- New loss of taste or smell
- Sore throat
- Headache *when in combination with other symptoms*
- Muscle aches or body aches
- Nausea, vomiting, or diarrhea
- Fatigue, when in combination with other symptoms
- Nasal congestion or runny nose (not due to other known causes, such as allergies) *when in combination with other symptoms*

The hope is that by staying home families can determine the severity of the symptoms, and if they do not subside or they get worse, we urge you to call your physician for next steps. If feeling better and have been fever free without medicine for 24 hours, one can return to school. The guidance is posted on the website as a point of reference for families and caregivers.

Thank you to our school community for your on-going commitment to keeping yourself and others safe during the pandemic. Please continue to follow the

guidelines, especially wearing a mask and social distancing as required. Together we can keep our trajectory low and keep each other safe with the hope of ending this pandemic and returning to our lives as we once knew them. The holiday season is approaching, and this commitment is more important than ever. Let us all continue to be diligent in our practices so that we can hopefully get back to in-person school in the new year!

As always, please feel free to reach out with any questions or concerns. Please be well and thank you for entrusting your children to us each day.

~ Beth Regulbuto, Superintendent of Schools