

RTS Committee Meeting

Wednesday, 10/29/2020 @ 6 p.m.

Present: Autumn Belajonas, Adam Bullard, Beckie Delaney, Amy Drinkwater, Mike Felton, Beth Giggey, Amy Hufnagel, Margot Kelley, Rob Kelley, Alane Kennedy, Cassie Kilbride, Josh McPhail, Shasta Minery, Stephanie Simmons, Meghan Smith

- **Current status in Knox County and MidCoast**

- Amy reported that the data is not good and cases are rising in the state and in our area. There has been an outbreak at an assisted care facility in Rockland. There have been confirmed cases at several schools including CHRHS and MVHS.

- **Rapid Testing**

- State will be receiving Abbot BinaxNow rapid antigen tests. These tests for COVID-19 can be administered by a school nurse who has received training. The nurse rubs a swab inside a patient's nostrils and then paces onto a small piece of cardboard the size of the credit card. The results are available within 15 minutes. State reports that these tests have a high degree of reliability
- If a student tests positive while at school, they would be quarantined until family arrived to take them home. They would then be advised to get another COVID test from their doctor.
- Test is much less invasive than the test most people receive in this area that requires the swab to go far up the nasal passage. The rapid test would only be used for students exhibiting symptoms. If a student tested negative, they would need to go home until the symptoms went away, however, they may be able to return to school sooner (assuming no symptoms) b/c they would not need to get another COVID test.
- A rapid positive test would allow contact tracing to begin immediately.
- Recent BDN article [Maine schools haven't been testing students for COVID-19, and that's probably OK](#). Recognize that the testing experience can be very difficult for children and concern about a student being tested without their parents present. Concerns that this would require Autumn to take on another task in an already busy year. Importance of parent permission before testing. Parent consent would be required.
- Concerns regarding the emotional impact rapid testing could have on students.
- Point made about benefit of ruling OUT students that have symptoms and confirming it isn't COVID so they can potentially return to school the following day. The Abbott test is less invasive and having it on hand may allow students and parents the ability to return to work or school sooner. Disagree that these should be used as a class or school-wide test and doesn't believe the tests were made for that purpose.
- Mike asked Autumn to share a more detailed description of the tests and testing protocols after she gets more info from the State. This info will be reviewed by the RtS Committee, LT, and School Board. The Board will weigh in on this issue before any decision is made.

- **Staff Reports:**

- Staff report that school is going well and teachers are working very hard. Overall students and staff are doing well with the new protocols. It takes a great deal of staff effort to make sure days go smoothly. Staff invest time and energy working with students to wear their masks appropriately and to socially distance. Reminders about social distancing and masks need to occur in the class and outside at recess. Staff avoid making masks a discipline issue, instead focusing on reminders and conversations.
- Mike said that his main concerns are around the amount of energy staff need to invest every day to ensure the school day goes smoothly and students are learning and engaged. He says that staff are proud that our school-community was able to return to 5-days-per-week instruction.

- **Return to School – October Staff Survey**

- 27 respondents
- Reconfiguring curriculum to meet COVID guidelines, supporting students with IEPs, and supporting students' social-emotional needs were some of the areas staff identified where they need the most support
- Overall, staff feel admin has been helpful in resolving challenges so far this year.
- Staff felt strongly that the school is effectively supporting them in meeting students' health and well-being needs
- *What parts of the RtS Plan are working well?*
 - Generally feeling that planning for this year went well and prepared us for return to in-person instruction
 - Pride and gratitude about returning to in-person instruction
 - Feel positive about work custodians are doing cleaning and sanitizing the building
 - In-person may be challenging but much preferred to virtual
 - School Nurse Autumn doing a great job
 - Small class sizes working well
 - Social distancing and mask wearing
- *What parts of the RtS Plan need to be improved?*
 - Increased demands on teacher time that has had substantial impact on planning and prep
 - Lots of effort to prepare lessons – additional initiatives and demands feel overwhelming
 - Lunch in classroom and no morning recess
 - Meeting and trainings on Friday afternoons have cut into planning time as well
 - Managing social distancing and mask wearing for students/ consistency of social distancing and mask wearing for students between classes / managing social distancing and mask wearing during recess
 - Need more clarity around policies if someone is exposed to the virus

- *What is your biggest concern?*
 - Complacency and fraying around the edges regarding following health & safety protocols
 - Need to remain vigilant about mask wearing and social distancing
 - Stress levels for staff/ teacher burnout
 - Teaching in the current situation and with the health and safety protocols is challenging enough. Additional demands to involving addressing students' mental well-being, individual goal setting, and new SEL curriculum is overwhelming.
 - Loss of instructional time due to mask breaks and other protocols
 - Loss of planning time
 - Meeting needs of all students
 - Keeping everyone masked and social distanced to keep people safe and minimize disruption in event of positive case
 - Going back to remote learning/ Keeping students engaged if we need to go remote
 - Lack of social distancing outside of school
- *What are you most proud of as a teacher/staff member?*
 - Working with so many professionals at the top of their game
 - Flexibility and ability to work as team players
 - Being a teacher for students who are here full time where many schools in the state and country have not been able to do this
 - Dedicated, supportive staff that is a credit to their profession
 - That we as a community school stuck together during this time of uncertainty and challenge. We continue to work hard everyday to make sure our students are safe and hear five days per week.
 - My students and their willingness to work through the challenges they are facing (sitting for most of the day at a desk, keeping on their masks, loss of morning recess, lunch in classrooms, etc.). Their positive attitude, kindness, and excitement for learning make each day special.
 - Connections I have made with students
 - Developing an innovative program. Passion for subject.
 - That we are able to be here working with our students. I know my students have no idea how challenging and stressful my job is right now.
 - Proud of having a positive attitude and staying friendly and connected even though sometimes I feel afraid or uncomfortable.
 - Everyone wants the student to be supported and healthy and even though staff is tired and overwhelmed they never let the safety of our kids be less than their first priority.
 - Students generally seem to be enjoying their school year.
 - Resiliency of staff, students and parents.
 - Making school still feel like school for kids and finding ways to bring enthusiasm, structure, and joy to the school day.

- I am proud that we are able to have our kids here 5 days a week and that we also have plans in place for many different circumstances. And for those unforeseen circumstances – the unknown unknowns – we have the will, resources, and talent to overcome as a group.
 - The out of the box thinking that made it possible to get students here every day
- **Mask breaks – consistency and time limits/ hallways**
 - At monthly Board/SGEA meeting, Association shared that members have raised concerns about protocols during mask breaks. Concerns involved mask breaks going on for an extended period of time, students not staying 6 ft apart during mask breaks, windows not always being open during breaks, and inconsistency between how teachers approach to mask breaks
 - RtS Committee agreed that Leadership Team should discuss these issues and come up with more consistent protocols
 - Mike will send letter to staff highlighting importance of remaining vigilant as we enter winter season and address mask wearing and mask breaks
- **Workshop days on Mon/Tue before Thanksgiving and Winter Breaks**
 - Board and SGEA reps also discussed making Monday and Tuesday before Thanksgiving Break and Christmas Break workshop days. This would provide teachers planning and prep time. In addition, these days are generally not the most productive learning times for students.
 - Will reach out to Blueberry Cove to determine if they can provide childcare to working parents on workshop days
 - Board will discuss at emergency School Board meeting
- **Protocols and definition of close contacts**
 - Mike shared that he talked with Maine DOE School Nurse Consultant Emily Poland
 - She said that household members of individuals identified as “close contacts” do *not* need to quarantine. This means if a St. George high school student is identified as a “close contact,” then their younger sibling who attends St. George School would be allowed – based on CDC and DOE guidelines –to attend school.
- **Letter to Families**
 - RtS Committee agreed Mike should draft a letter to families encouraging everyone to continue to adhere to social distancing and health/safety protocols during holiday season
 - Importance of these protocols as we move into winter season
 - Recommended to include information about travel instructions and risks associated with large social gatherings
- **New Data on Schools Reopening in U.S. and Europe**

- Recent articles:
 - The Atlantic - [Schools Aren't Super-Spreaders](#)
 - NYT - [What Parents Need to Know About School Coronavirus Case Data](#)
 - NYT - [Schoolchildren Seem Unlikely to Fuel Coronavirus Surges, Scientist Say](#)
- Mike said that the most recent data/research seems to show that reopening schools is not accelerating viral spread
- Want to avoid returning to extended remote instruction if at all possible. Serious concerns about negative impacts on students and families if we return to remote for an extended period of time.
- Current plan is that if there is a positive COVID-19 case at St. George School, we would close for 2 days to allow for contact tracing and time to disinfect/sanitize school. Then school would reopen
- **Concern about time for middle level student to eat lunch on Fridays**
 - Concern raised that some middle level students said they do not have time to eat lunch on Friday 1/2 days
 - Josh will talk with middle level team to ensure that students have time to each lunch before leaving on Fridays.