



# Sand Creek Community Schools Update from Mr. Laundra July 28, 2020

Good evening Sand Creek. As the deadline for submitting our school district's Return to School Plan for this fall is quickly approaching, I want to continue to keep you apprised of where our school district currently stands. There are many factors that are making this decision difficult; not only for our school district, but for every district in Michigan and the rest of our country. No matter where our Return to Learning Plan ends

up looking like, 40-50% of you may not fully agree with what it has to offer or not offer. This situation has put school superintendents and school boards across the nation in a very tough position.

With that in mind, tonight I'm going to share out some of the recent survey data we've collected from our school district in an attempt to illustrate where our parents, faculty and support staff stand on some of these issues. After sharing the survey data, I will get into the details of each Return to School plan that our school district is currently discussing and considering, along with the pros and cons to each.

When I've finished my presentation, I will be opening this topic up for discussion with the Sand Creek school board and administration. Once the school board and administrators have had their opportunity to ask questions, get clarifications and make comments, we will move into the public comment portion of tonight's meeting.

The Sand Creek school board does not plan to make any final decisions about our Return to Learning Plan at tonight's meeting. The intent of tonight's meeting is to further educate our school board and our community about all the challenging factors that are in play at this time.

## **SURVEY DATA PRESENTATION**

Sand Creek Community Schools is currently considering two Face-to-Face models of instruction and 1-2 virtual models.

**The first instructional model is Face-to-Face education 5 days a week**, similar to how we have gone to school at Sand Creek since our doors opened back in 1921. In order to comply with the governor's requirements for a face to face model, there are multitudes of safety precautions that must be in place, including but not limited to social distancing to the best of our ability, wearing face masks as prescribed... K-5 masks on buses and in the common areas of their building but not in the classroom, and 6-12 students and all employees masked at all times. Face to face education in either form will

include strict assigned seating charts on buses and in classrooms, as well as our best effort to distance students and staff from each other to the best of our ability. Going face to face will most likely require us to hire a significant number of Covid-19 assistants to disinfect our buildings on a regular basis, to supervise students on buses, during lunch, on the playground, in the hallways and restrooms, etc. Face to face 5 days a week is a tall order logistically, compared to the other options. Depending on how many families/students we have to accommodate in this model, 6 foot distancing will not be possible in most situations, including on our school buses and in our classrooms. While this model will definitely provide your student/s with the best educational results compared to the others, in terms of the safety factor it is clearly the most risky (least safe) of the models currently being considered. This model will allow us to deliver approximately 75% of the curriculum we normally cover with our students in a school year.

While this model is the closest to school as we've always known it, it will not be the same. Students will be trying to learn from teachers with masks on, and teachers will be trying to read the faces of their students with masks on. We cannot underestimate the impact that facial expressions make in teaching and learning. Without the real face in the picture, the delivery of instruction will be less effective. Masks are not an option for 6-12 students and K-12 employees; they have to wear them at all times, except when eating or drinking. Wearing a mask will be optional for K-5 students once they're seated in their classroom. We will be wearing masks during the hottest part of the school year. Our K-12 employees and 6-12 students will essentially be wearing a mask 7 hours a day, except when eating. Group work and hands on projects in the classroom (like science labs) and student interaction will essentially be non-existent. We will have to deliver instruction the old fashion way... sit down, shut-up, face forward and listen to the teacher lecture. Will it allow for Q & A, yes, but not in the same open way we're all accustomed to.

In addition, classrooms must be disinfected every time a group leaves the classroom and a new group comes in. This includes disinfecting desk tops, chairs, door knobs, light switches, etc. Some of this may be the students responsibility, some of it will be an added teacher responsibility, and some of it may be the Covid-19 Assistants responsibilities, assuming we can hire people to do this work. In addition to during the school day cleaning, deep cleaning must take place at the end of every school day. This will be done by the maintenance and custodial staff, which may require more employees as well. Breakfast and lunch will be eaten in individual classrooms, and in many cases, this will not provide 6 foot distancing and will not include masks. Covid-19 employees will be needed to supervise classrooms during the lunch period. Covid-19 employees may need to be hired to help supervise our school busses. All students boarding the bus must be masked and must apply hand sanitizer to their hands upon entry and exit. Depending on how many students use school transportation, our busses will clearly be the least safe environment at school in terms of social distancing. For five days a week face to face, most of our bus seats will have at least two in a seat and some cases three in a seat. For social distancing purposes, we will not be able to seat the younger students in the front of the bus and the older students in the back, a practice we've been using for years. Instead, we will be keeping siblings and bus stop groups of students together and away from students from other bus stops, to the best of our ability.

If we decide to take student temperatures before allowing students in our buildings or on our busses every day, it would likely require us to hire Covid-19 bus assistants for both the morning and afternoon

bus routes. Busses have to be deep cleaned in between runs, which translates to twice a day for Sand Creek. The deep clean process will also likely require the school hire additional help. I am extremely concerned that our school district may not be able to hire 15-25 covid-19 assistants to provide us with the help we may need to open safely. How many parents or community members will be willing to work for a modest hourly rate five days a week on our school busses and/or in our school buildings packed with 400 students and 50 employees each? Not being able to hire this help could shut face to face construction down before we even get a chance to start.

Where are our teachers and support staff in regards to returning to school face to face with students? This will be the biggest challenge to returning to school face to face in either form. How many employees will decide to retire or resign? How many employees will opt out of working? How often will employees use sick days and will we be able to get substitute teachers and substitute support staff when this happens? What happens when a student or employee gets sick and shows Covid-19 symptoms? What happens when one of our students or employees test positive for Covid-19? What happens to employees and students who are exposed to someone that has contracted Covid-19 or that has shown Covid-19 symptoms and are waiting for test results to come in? If more than a teacher or two has to quarantine for 14 days before returning to work, who's going to take their place? This we know, if we cannot get our employees to work in a face to face setting, we will be forced to go 100% virtual with little warning. How long can we keep it safe for 800 students and 100+ employees in two buildings?

Ironically, of the three main models we're offering, face to face five days a week is logistically the most challenging, due to all the safety precautions. Why ironically? Because we're all well trained in face to face, but not in this unprecedented setting.

**The second instructional model is the Hybrid model**, which is Face-to-Face education on a part time basis, most likely two days a week in school and 3 days a week at home. This translates to half of our face-to-face students in the building at the same time. The fifth day of the week in this model would be an open office hour's opportunity for students and parents to make live individual contact (virtually) with their teachers. This model is a little safer than the face-to-face 5 days a week model as it will allow for improved distancing and will keep all students 100% away from the other half of the hybrid model students. The down side of this model compared to the 5 days a week model is that we will likely only be able to cover 40-60% of the content we normally cover in a school year. This model also puts some parents and employees in a very difficult day-care and home supervision situation. The hybrid model will include all of the same challenges the 5 days a week face to face model when they're in school. It will require our kitchen staff to serve meals in two different forms; "in school" for the face to face students and "pick-up" for students who are at home that day.

**The third instructional model is the Sand Creek Teacher Virtual Education model**. This virtual education model would only involve Sand Creek teachers. This model has students at home 5 days a

week, similar to last spring. This Virtual Education model is by far the safest model of instruction. In theory, it is 100% safe. While the virtual model will not have the same educational impact as face to face 5 days a week, Sand Creek will be much better prepared to deliver virtual instruction to our students at home than we were last spring. Regardless of how we start school this fall, all of our students will be issued a school Chromebook that solves the device gap that existed this spring. In addition, our faculty is currently going through extensive training on Google Classroom and Remote Learning, which will improve the outcomes we got last spring. This model will allow us to deliver approximately 60-75% of the curriculum we normally cover in a school year. One upside to this method of instruction is that it's 100% safe for students and employees. Another advantage to starting the school year this way is getting to watch how face to face schools do before doing it ourselves. Make no mistake about it, the Sand Creek administration, faculty and staff know that face to face education is the most effective way to educate our students, and that teaching and learning remotely from home is the safest. How do we justify not being as safe as we can during the pandemic? Some of the downsides to virtual education include insufficient internet access in some homes, parental responsibility to see that their students remain engaged and that they understand the content, assignments, an abundance of screen time for students, parents and teachers. 100% virtual education will likely create a disconnect between teachers and students compared to face to face. It will be very difficult to build strong meaningful relationships between students and teachers in the virtual education model.

**The fourth instructional model being considered is fading fast.** This model is a 100% virtual education offering that involves a third party on-line education vendor. **This setting does not involve our teachers.** This type of virtual education is expensive, and the jury's still out on the educational impact this method of learning will have on our students. While it too is 100% safe compared to face-to-face, it will likely create an undesirable level of disconnect for Sand Creek students and parents. That stated, if we return face-to-face in either form (#1 or #2), if the number of students wanting a virtual option is low enough, we may consider offering a third party on-line education vendor option.

This summarizes the models of instruction our school district is currently considering. There are many pros, cons and factors that play into all of these models. While we may be giving students/families a choice on the model of instruction, we may not be able to give our employees the same choices. I am very concerned about what will happen if a few teachers decide to retire or resign due to their personal safety concerns about returning to school face-to-face in either form. While students will always be #1 in our industry, we cannot deliver what we owe you without all of our teachers. If we decide to offer a face-to-face option for students when we start school, and students, teachers and staff get sick, get Covid-19 or are exposed to someone else that has Covid-19, it could shut our face to face instruction down in a big hurry and force us into the virtual education model. Even if Sand Creek stays safe in a face-to-face setting, if too many other school districts have to shut down due to sickness and/or lack of healthy teachers, it is likely the governor will put us back into Phase 3, which translates to 100% virtual education for all students in the state.

**Other Return to School ideas that have been brought forward and discussed include...**

- 1) Bringing back elementary or lower elementary students face to face, but going virtual with the rest. The younger the student, the more crucial face to face education is.
- 2) A hybrid model that only brings students into the building one day a week. If we brought kids in in this model four days a week, we could probably 6 foot distance as well.
- 3) Virtual students login to each teacher's classroom for class from home. I'm skeptical that our teachers will be able to teach and reach their virtual students in this setting. In theory, the virtual students in this model would be on their screens 6-7 hours a school day.
- 4) If we bring some or all of the elementary students back face to face, we could consider bringing the 6<sup>th</sup> grade back as well. They will brand new to the JH/HS building this year. We may also considered bringing in our special education students on a regular or as needed.

### **County Wide Covid-19 Unification on Return to School**

Tomorrow morning will be the fifth county superintendents meeting in the past 22 days. We have been trying to come up with a unification plan that would make all of our educational delivery options the same across the board, in an effort to protect each other's enrollment. All of the county superintendents are concerned about losing students to other school districts by way of SOC because of what they decide or don't decide to offer. While I still have some hope that we can unify, based on where we were last week when we met, I am not confident that we'll all be on the same page when the bell rings this fall.

### **Athletics & Extra-Curricular Activities**

The MHSAA and the governor are going to need to agree very soon on what's going to fly and what isn't, or whether to delay the start of sports, or switch seasons or both. I'm expecting a decision on t6his within the next ten days. HS sports are scheduled to officially start on Monday august 10<sup>th</sup>. Personally, I don't see sports starting on time and I fear our fall sports season is in jeopardy of happening. As for all the other extra-curricular activities we offer, they too are in jeopardy. If you're in the band and/or FFA, stay tuned.

These are some of the major issues and decisions before us right now, and the clock is running. In short, this really boils down to what should our biggest priority be right now. The health & safety of students or should it be the quality of education in the safest form possible? Normally, both are of equal importance. But Covid-19 is forcing us all to make some decisions one way or the other, unless we favor the compromising choice. 100% virtual education is 100% safe. 5 days a week face to face will be the most effective method of education, but the riskiest choice in terms of health and safety. The hybrid model is sort of the compromise between the two, but it is not 100% safe. So how and when will all of this be decided? I will be making a recommendation to the board of education at next Monday night's, August 3<sup>rd</sup> special school board meeting at 6pm. From there, our board of education will need to officially approve our plan. Our parents and students need to know what the options are going to be and how they will affect them. And the school district needs to know how many students from specific grades are going to do what, so that the logistical planning can begin.

Thank you for your continued patience as we work towards the best solutions for our school district. All the board and I want is the best solution for our students, our families and our staff. I can say with no reservations that no matter where we end up on this, you can continue to know that we are 100% committed to doing what's best for students to the best of our ability.

**Face to Face:**

Pros:

1. Most effective way to educate
2. Provides some social interaction
3. Improves student/teacher relationship
4. Less parent involvement required
5. It's the closest to the norm of the four options.

Cons:

1. Highest safety risk of the four options
2. Transportation - minimal social distance
3. Disinfecting classrooms and buildings multiple times throughout the school day
4. The inability to 6 foot social distance
5. Confirmed Covid-19 cases will cause some staff and students to have to quarantine for 14 days
6. Substitute teachers will be at an extreme premium, which may cause school closures
7. Student will be eating without masks or social distancing.
8. Due to safety risks some employees may not return to school
9. Masks will hinder communication and comfort, not to mention how they'll effect students emotionally and physically during the warmer months of the fall.
10. Will we be able to hire enough Covid-a9 employees to help with the extra work?

**Hybrid:**

Pros:

1. Less exposure to classmates.

2. Better social distancing on busses
3. Better social distancing in the classroom
4. Some social interaction

Cons:

1. Supervision at home
2. Increased parent involvement required
3. Potential childcare challenges
4. Not 100% safe
5. Less curriculum coverage

**Virtual by Sand Creek:**

Pros:

1. Safest way to deliver instruction
2. 1 to 1 Chromebooks is now a reality at Sand Creek
3. All SC teachers are currently being trained on the Google Classroom platform (better consistency)
4. Sand Creek teachers only; no outsiders will be teaching your students.
5. Less chance of losing employees
6. All Sand Creek Curriculum
7. No transportation safety issues
8. No disinfecting challenges
9. Safer food service distribution
10. Masks are not required
11. Cost effective
12. We can step back and watch how face to face schooling is going other places before making our decision to return to face to face.

Cons:

1. Least effective way than either face to face model

2. Minimal social interaction
3. Minimal relationship between students, parents, teachers
4. Potential childcare challenges
5. More parent involvement

**Virtual by 3<sup>rd</sup> Party**

Pros:

1. Safest way to deliver instruction
2. 1 to 1 Chromebooks
3. No transportation safety issues
4. No disinfecting challenges
5. Safer food service distribution
6. Masks are not required

Cons:

1. Minimal student/teacher relationship
2. Sand Creek curriculum will not be used
3. Least effective way to educate students
4. Minimal social interaction
5. Minimal relationship between students, parents, teachers
6. Potential childcare challenges
7. More parent involvement is required
8. Not cost effective for the school district