

D101 Common Parent Questions FAQ

These **10** topics emerged as the most frequent themes from parent & community correspondence we received.

November 4, 2020

In an effort to have the Board of Education Town Hall scheduled for November 4, 2020 run as efficiently as possible, answers to the following topics are being provided in advance. The topics have been aggregated from the parent and community correspondence we have received.

Please submit additional questions to boequestions@d101.org so that they may be addressed on November 4th.

D101's goal is to continue to deliver education at the highest level possible within the current pandemic environment until a return to regular school days, when all children in school all day, every day, is possible.

As stated in the survey, the following factors have been, and will continue to be, considered in all decisions moving forward are:

- Health and safety considerations for students and staff
- Academic and social emotional needs of our students
- Guidance from IDPH, ISBE, CDC & the Governor's Office
- Parent feedback
- Operational logistics and financial implications

Question #1 Student Progress: How do the rigor and expectations for this school year compare to previous years? Are our kids "falling behind?"

Answer: This is a very normal parent worry, and there are two ways to view the question. The first way one can look at this question is from a national comparison perspective (ie. Since we are experiencing a *global pandemic* we know that ALL kids have experienced different schooling adjustments and approaches since March of this year.) If we use our school Fall 2020 MAP data and compare it to other schools across the nation, our grade levels, on average, performed as well or better than **96%** of other grade levels nationally. [See *National SCHOOL Comparison Chart*]

Another way to look at this is from a curricular perspective. Because of the ways we've prioritized instruction K-5, maintained all classes at McClure--and for all grades--implemented *daily* asynchronous work/task boards that correspond to in-class work, our students are maintaining similar levels of rigor in core subjects in grades 2-8. Science and social studies content coverage is not the same in K/1. Rather, our youngest students are focusing on foundational literacy and numeracy.

Dr. Barnhart and Dr. Coffey met with every grade level and content area team on October 13 and our teachers, consistently, reported that a rose among the thorns has been the positive impact of dramatically smaller class sizes. These have allowed increases in pacing, personalized instruction and feedback for our students.

Question #2 Social Distancing: Why 6 feet? And why can't we just use all available spaces in buildings to get everyone back in? Other schools seem to be doing so?

Answer: *Why 6 feet?* IDPH guidance is clear on how “close contact” must be handled in all public schools. A COVID positive person must quarantine for 10 days from the date following the date of a positive test result. Any person who comes in “close contact” with a COVID positive person must quarantine for 14 days. The same is also true for any person who comes in “close contact” with a COVID-symptomatic person. Our ability to maintain social distancing in our Hybrid model almost eliminates the potential need for a classroom, classrooms or entire schools to shut down due to any of the above scenarios. Remove social distancing, and the ability for us to offer daily instructional and environmental consistency for our students (i.e. not switch frequently between remote and in-person learning) goes away.

And why can't we just use all available spaces...? Even if we used every classroom/gym/library space available and we moved every specialist teacher out of his/her classroom onto a cart--and we hired the teaching staff to accommodate 6-9 additional sections per building, we would require a range of 3-5 additional spaces at each elementary building to accommodate our student population and maintain social distancing. We do believe we are able to achieve social distancing and “getting everyone back in” at McClure. Doing so, it should be emphasized, does require other trade offs to be made. Butler and Gower, two neighboring school districts who report they are “all-in,” in addition to being half the size of D101, have 15% or more (Butler has 40%) students choosing Fully Remote. We currently have ~5% of students opting for Fully Remote.

Question #3 Instructional Minutes: Other area schools have removed specials'/electives from their in-person schedules to prioritize core subjects. Why aren't we doing the same?

Answer: We believe in the value of our students experiencing a well rounded education. In fact, for many of our students, specials and electives classes are their favorite part of school. These classes offer our students social connection, creative exploration and reinforce the District 101 value of developing the whole child. Additionally, District 101 does not have the core content area teachers necessary to provide a “core only” or even “core heavy” school day currently.

Question #4 Instructional Approaches: It seems pretty simple. Why can't students just watch class from home during their remote time?

Answer: Instructional quality is paramount for our students and is certainly a priority equal to maximizing the quantity of in-person minutes during a global pandemic. Teaching in this new environment--and doing so effectively--is not simple. We have spent many hours and days researching and developing instructional approaches that fit our new constraints.

Although this model--watching/experiencing a live class from home while in-person students are also experiencing it--is one that many school districts are presently utilizing, we do not believe it is appropriate for our younger learners. We want our students to be fully present with their classroom teachers during their in-person learning time; we do not want our teachers toggling between ~12 in-person students and ~12 at-home students simultaneously and the result being mediocre. Our teachers report that they are experiencing "on-track" rates of growth from their students - even when compared to typical school years - due to very small classes and, consequently, increased personalized instruction. More simply put, teachers report that students--this year--are "keeping up" with typical curriculum demands.

We do believe that this particular model may be effective for our older learners for some subjects. In fact, we are testing this hypothesis for the Second Quarter right now at McClure in 7th and 8th grade math classes.

Question #5 Communication: How can we all get on the same page? I feel like I don't know what's going on?

Answer: If you feel this way, we apologize. High level, transparent, and consistent communication is very important to the District. We are presently exploring ways we can improve the frequency and clarity of communication for all of our constituents. If you ever have questions, please reach out to your child's teacher, principal, Dr. Coffey, or Dr. Barnhart. We want all families to feel heard and respected regardless of concern.

Question #6 Quarantining Procedures: How does this actually work now? If we eliminated social distancing constraints, how would quarantine procedures change?

Answer: Presently, when a student or staff member needs to quarantine, they *alone* quarantine. Perhaps there are other students in quarantine at the same time due to close contact, but if so, the exposure has generally not occurred at school. Why is this important? This is important because it allows continuity of instruction, schedule, and experience for our students. During this highly stressful time for many, the ability for school to "go on as normal" is crucial for our students and our teachers. Students thrive on consistent schedules and expectations, and our teachers are able to deliver high quality instruction without having to reimagine the format due to frequently "closed" classrooms. If we eliminated social distancing, every time a student attended school with a single symptom OR tested COVID-positive, every other student who sat by that student in the 48 hours leading up to the incident or 48 hours after a positive diagnosis, would have to quarantine for 14 days. This change could effectively shut down whole classes and/or buildings frequently.

Question #7 Expert Guidance: If IDPH changed their school guidance, how would D101 respond?

Answer: Yes, if IDPH changes its guidance for schools, we will respond accordingly.

Question #8 Expectations Moving Forward: If now is not the right time to return to typical school, what happens next?

Answer: We will continue to focus on our priorities of safety and providing quality instruction for our students. Much like any other year, we remain committed to continuous improvement, even in this unprecedented time period. We will do so by reflecting upon our successes and opportunities through reviewing student progress and achievement data, talking with our teachers, principals and students, providing relevant professional development and soliciting feedback from our parents. Based on these elements, we will

then adjust and improve as opportunities present. To highlight examples of this to date, recognizing need and opportunity, we:

- doubled the space and number of staff in our kindergarten classes this year to provide socially-distant, pre-pandemic methods of instruction for our youngest students,
- adjusted the method of instruction to incorporate science and social studies into ELA in 2nd grade to increase instructional minutes,
- adjusted the method and quantity of math instruction in 6th grade to maximize in-person feedback opportunities and increase instructional minutes; and
- changed the learning format in 7th and 8th math classes to double “live” instructional time for our older learners.

Question #9 Metrics: What are the metrics and areas of consideration being used for decision-making moving forward?

Answer: The District, working with guidance from the Cook County Department of Public Health and the Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH), is monitoring COVID-19 transmission rates. It is our hope that metrics will continue to allow us to maintain an in-person instructional option for as long as possible. Please note that in addition to transmission rates (state, regional, Western Springs, District), we will continue to review a number of other criteria such as health and safety for students and staff, the academic and social emotional needs of our students, guidance from IDPH, ISBE, CDC and the Governor’s Office, parent feedback, operational logistics and financial implications.

Question #10 Social Emotional Learning: My child is really struggling socially and emotionally. They need to be in school all day. What are you doing for these students?

Answer: **98.7%** of our students reported feeling safe on our Fall 2020 Climate Survey and **96-99%** of students reported a sense of belonging at all 4 schools. Maintaining consistency for our students--through reliable daily schedules, connections with teachers and interactions with peers--is crucial for our students’ emotional health. Our Hybrid model, because of the careful risk mitigation factors that greatly reduce the likelihood for whole classes or schools to experience quarantine, allows for uninterrupted routines for our students.

While all of the above is helpful, it does not mean that this period of time is easy for your child or you. If your child is struggling, please, as always, directly contact your child’s principal or social worker. Resources are in place to address students’ varying emotional needs, and we will work with your son/daughter to the best of our abilities to ensure they are supported.