

We recently conducted our third Parent Advisory Group meeting, hearing great insight from many new participants.

Below are all the all questions and answers that were discussed.

We are working hard to prepare for our schools to open back up on Aug. 12. We will follow the CDC guidelines for opening schools to the best of our ability; however, we realize not all parents will be able to send their children back to school. We are planning to operate with students in attendance concurrently while offering online options for those students who may not be able to attend school.

The direction from the Mississippi Department of Education (MDE) has been to prepare a hybrid model of online instruction and in classroom instruction in the event we are forced to close schools again due to COVID-19 outbreaks in the State of Mississippi. The exact words used were, “prepare for intermittent school closures.”

It is our intention to incorporate feedback from the community and staff while monitoring CDC guidelines and the number of COVID-19 cases in Mississippi. We will release a complete Blueprint for opening school in the next few days.

Q: Why is TPSD offering a concurrent model of in school and virtual school?

There are many parents who are afraid. Many families have medically compromised parents and children living in their homes. Many students live with elderly grandparents. Where we can, we ought to provide all families with options during this pandemic. The concurrent model will help us provide social distancing for students who are in school because there will be fewer students on campus. However, a virtual education model is dependent on whether or not state legislators make the change for school districts to move from Average Daily Attendance to Average Daily Membership. If legislators do not make this change, we will not be able to provide a virtual model because students will be required by the state to be in classrooms.

Q: If a parent chooses a virtual model, will they still be able to participate in extra curricular activities?

Yes. Parents will have options. As we design the virtual program, we will allow students to still try out for and participate in sports programs. Social distancing protocols will be followed in many of our sports programs. We will not allow anyone who has a medically compromised situation at home and as a result is unable to attend school to participate in sports where it is not possible to achieve social distancing such as in basketball or football.

Q: Will TPSD work with daycare/after school programs if there is a staggered dismissal schedule?

Yes. We will have too. But note, we are not talking about staggering arrival and dismissal times of one hour or two hours. Staggering will be by the minutes.

Q: With the release of the considerations from MDE, has this changed any decisions made about the fall?

Not really. If you look at MDE considerations, they are consistent with the CDC guidelines. It's a different list for things to think about as you plan to reopen. They aren't telling anyone what they have to do. They encouraging everyone to prepare for a concurrent model and prepare for intermittent closings throughout the year.

Q: What about those who choose distance learning but have no internet access?

That's a great question and the biggest challenge the entire state faces. It's the reason we are sending textbooks and other materials home. But we have extended our internet services to our parking lots and I know several churches have as well. Students will be able download from any access point and work offline at home. One of the reasons we chose the CANVAS platform was that it serviced families in the Blue Ridge mountains where there is no service.

Q: Will kids who do distance learning fall behind those in a regular classroom setting?

It will be more robust platform in fall. Obviously, you can't replace a teacher in the classroom. But there will be accountability and expectations.

Q: If my child starts with traditional learning and then we decide distance learning is a better fit, how easy would this transition be?

Going to distance learning won't be as big a challenge. Moving from distance to traditional learning would be a challenge due to numbers and social distancing. If a parent chooses virtual education, the parent would have to stay in virtual education until the end of the semester.

Q: With the synchronous teaching, will there be a screen in each class where some students will be in the class and some home or will there be dedicated teachers that only teach online live classes?

We are working through that detail. We've looked at both options. We are waiting to see what our numbers look like. With high numbers, we would definitely have dedicated teachers.

Q: Should a student or staff member be diagnosed with Covid-19, what will be the protocol for the staff/students who may have come into contact with the infected person?

We will have a dedicated nurse at every school to handle those situations so principals and teachers won't have to. We will operate from the regimented protocol outlined by the CDC.

Q: Will elementary students be grouped by ability?

We will analyze data from previous school years and try to meet the different learning needs of students. Usually, our lower ability students are in smaller groups and our more advanced students are in larger groups. To maintain social distancing, we will have to balance those numbers.

Q: Do you expect teacher shortages?

We haven't seen any shortages or a rush of resignations.

Q: What will attending a football game look like for fans regarding entering, seating, concessions, etc. Furthermore, will games be played and will be practices allowed if school has to be shut down for a period of time?

We are guided by MHSAA, and they have been adamant about what sports will look like. Still waiting on specific guidelines to follow, and we will follow those. Football is very important in the state of Mississippi and it's a big money generator to all other sports.

Q: If you have one case of Covid-19, how long will the school shut down?

Anywhere from 2-5 days, depending on location and areas that need to be cleaned and disinfected. We are developing a full medical response plan that will be released to the public.

Q: If student or staff becomes positive in a particular school, do you plan to close that particular school or will the sister school (like Rankin for Joyner) also be closed? Do you plan to close the entire district if anybody in the district tests positive?

We will follow CDC guidelines on school closure. Our first step is to contact the Mississippi Health Organization in Jackson to get guidance. But right now, we would just close that one school to clean and disinfect. Again, we are working on a medical response plan.

Q: When do you think final decisions will be made about this school year at TPSD?

We will put out a draft of the Blue Print in the next few days to get feedback. It will outline how students can stay together in cohorts for longer periods of times. We will have to minimize and manage crowds, especially during a class change.

Q: How will the changing of classes work for THS and TMS?

Principals typically work through those details. The changes of classes will probably be staggered and fewer in number.

Q: What is the update with requiring the students to wear masks?

They will be encouraged and expected when social distance isn't possible. We recommend masks and face shields where applicable and feasible. Face coverings are applicable when social distancing is not possible. It is not feasible to expect a student to wear a mask all day long. We will do our best to manage social distancing protocols, so students only have to wear masks when necessary.

Q: What would cause a school to close? A confirmed case in a student or faculty? Or confirmed case in household or even extended family that may have come in contact with student or faculty?

That's something we are working on now to figure out. We will have a more definitive answer before we open schools. If there is a confirmed case, we will close that school up to two days to get the thorough cleaning. On an extended family member testing positive, we're not sure how we can know that. We are coming out with a medical response plan in the next few days.

Q: Will masks or the face shields be available?

Both will be available, and the district will purchase them.

Q: Last week it was mentioned temperature checks might not happen. Has there been any more thought on this? Even if temperatures are checked upon arrival, parents will dose their children before they leave the house. So will temperatures be checked later in the morning to catch those who's end their children to school sick?

We need parents to understand they can't send sick kids to school. We are going to enforce that diligently. We must have cooperation from all parents. If your child is sick, keep your child at home.

Q: If a child is absent or sent home with fever, can schools require them to get a Covid-19 test?

No. We cannot.

Q: Could schools require a doctor's note for return?

Yes. We believe that we can. But we need to do further research.

Q: In the case of distance learning for the entire school district (if/when school is shut down), will there be a uniform way classes are handled, or will each teacher handle their own class differently? It seems virtual classes with teacher video and a set regular time for each class would provide more structure as opposed to simply sending assignments and grading what student did.

That's the purpose of CANVAS. Last year, we didn't have a good learning management system. Our teachers were asked to just jump in and figure it out in less 48 hours. Moving forward, our distance learning program will be highly structured. We will have expectations of students being on time. We will be more structured. We will be more task oriented and accountable. It will be like regular school in that there will be school all day. We are working out the details.

Q: When will we have to declare if our student will be a distant learner or attending traditionally for start of school?

We haven't set a deadline on that. We are getting information from individual schools with the surveys they are doing. We are trying to provide as much flexibility as possible and as many options as possible.

Q: Would a student be able to do both distance learning and traditional, or is it one or the other?

We prefer one. Otherwise, we will have kids coming and going and that's not safe either.

Q: If you start in the traditional classroom and this does not work (especially for younger kids), can you then do online?

Yes.

Q: We learned in the news of a child in Mississippi with a case of Multisystem Inflammatory Syndrome due to COVID-19. This effects children five and under. Is that being monitored/considered?

That's something we don't know a lot about, but it's something we are looking into.

Q: Will any training be available to parents?

Yes. We will provide training for parents on how to use CANVAS. We will do that on WebX. Misty McRae (instructional technology director) will be setting up training times to teach parents how to use CANVAS.

Q: With distance learning, will there be appropriate breaks for lunch, exercise, etc?

Yes. Yes. We will build in art activities and different things to have a robust experience. There will also be brain breaks.

Q: For seniors, community projects are one of the biggest things they do in terms of grades for English. Has there been any consideration of changing that since it involves meeting in groups, interacting with community?

We are looking at ways to do it differently. We are looking at ways to adjust the senior project.

Q: If children decide to do online classes, how will children receive accommodations?

We will send out information on accommodations as each student is different. They will be customizable. Accommodations are very individualized and subject to IEP team decisions.

Q: Will the final decision about class size and precaution measures (as well as a decision about an A/B schedule) be made soon or will that be in limbo until the first of August depending on MD and how the cases of COVID rise/fall during the rest of the summer.

Right now, we are doing everything we can to try to go to tradition. An AB schedule is something we can go to if we have to. But that would put a lot of hardship on parents who work. So, we are doing everything we can to provide for traditional school with a virtual school option.

Q: Will there be parent/teacher conferences in person?

We will have virtual open houses and conferences. We have to limit the number of people coming into schools. That allows us to have a controlled environment.

Q: Are there any specific plans for ECEC?

As they are our youngest students, they might be the easiest to transition but the hardest to manage. It's a numbers thing too, waiting to see what their enrollment will be. It's going to be hard to keep a 4-year-old social distancing, but I am certain the principal and team are figuring out the logistical details.

Q: Can you clarify about masks and face shields? If a parent does not want their child to wear one, will they not have to wear one?

We can't require them, but we will encourage them where applicable and feasible. If a student refuses to wear a face covering, we will make sure the student participates following social distancing. They will not be put into small groups.

Q: Will there be increased cleaning?

Yes. Everywhere. We have doubled our janitorial services. Medical experts say it's about cleaning high-touch areas, and that will be our focus. We follow the guidance from medical experts.

Q: Will there be an option for a mask or shield?

Yes. It will be up to the students as to which one they will wear.

Q: Will masks go home with kids or will they be taken up each day?

They will go home to be cleaned. We don't have the capability to wash them. We don't have washers and dryers. We will encourage parent responsibility.

Q: Can you give encouragement to those worried more about the social emotional effects of all these changes? Some parents say it sounds like a prison instead of a school. Can you spin this positively?

We are going to do our very best to make school exciting and fun. We want a celebratory atmosphere with a more flexible learning experience. It will be different. It won't look like it did before spring break. Things are different now. We have a whole task force for social emotional needs to assist our students. We know that is going to be a major challenge for many of our students, but we are going to do our best to stay positive as we approach this challenge. Our goal is to keep things as close to normal as possible but to provide for CDC guidelines where possible.

Q: Do you know yet if there are any restrictions on what backpacks and lunch boxes will have to be like?

No. It will be the same as they were in the past.

Q: What kind of person-to-person contact will be allowed? Teachers love their kids and regularly give hugs, especially with younger kids. Will that kind of contact be restricted?

Our elementary teachers are huggers, and they love their students. We will take all necessary precautions. If they cover themselves and make sure everyone is safe, you will still see hugs. For many, it's just a natural response.