



Superintendent's Office

Remarks for Superintendent's Report

Before I begin, I have a few remarks and kindly ask the Board to hold all questions until the very end of the presentation.

Some have heard me say the following before. But given the context, it bears repeating.

Public schools, teachers and staff, superintendents and school boards across the nation have been asked to do the impossible—to deliver a high-quality education to all students while ensuring the health and wellness of our children, families and employees, and to do our part in containing community spread of COVID-19. Pandemic-related revenue shortfalls and a largely inadequate national response to this crisis have impacted both public institutions and private businesses. The vital role of schools in managing the pandemic has been used by some people to politicize and polarize. The resulting conflict has demoralized and frustrated many educators, including me. So, I get it. I feel our collective pain. Nevertheless, we must shape a forward path to providing some in-person support for our students this school year.

I fully recognize that miracles have been worked in VPS. And, I am so grateful to our students, staff and families. Unfortunately, context matters. Students with the greatest need are doing less well in remote learning. According to recent stories published in the WA Post and the Boston Globe, school districts from coast to coast have reported the number of students failing classes has risen by as many as two or three times — with English language learners and disabled and disadvantaged students struggling the most. The same trend is true for VPS and other Clark County districts. Those students farthest from educational justice are being impacted disproportionately by the pandemic and remote learning in spite of our very best efforts. Additionally, isolation and loneliness caused by the pandemic and remote learning has created unintended anxiety and depression for too many of our nation's children and youth.

After more than ten months of learning about COVID-19 and the precautionary measures that reduce transmission, we can and must, reopen, schools in a sensible way. Public health experts say we can do it safely, consistent with the updated December 16 WA

DOH guidance for schools and Governor Inslee's proclamation. We now know much more about the major sources of transmission, COVID-19 risk to children and youth and the efficacy of CDC-recommended risk mitigation strategies. Both Governor Inslee and State Superintendent Chris Reykdal have strongly encouraged school districts to begin re-opening, immediately, with the necessary safety protocols in place.

Along with other county districts, we continue to consult with Clark County Public Health. All county districts plan to scale K-5 hybrid schedules over the next several weeks. CCPH supports those plans.

I know some are advocating for a delay until vaccinations are complete for all K-12 employees. As indicated in yesterday's press release, EPS and VPS have sent a letter to Governor Inslee asking for K-12 employees to be classified as essential workers and to be included in the phase 1, B2, category scheduled for vaccination during the month of February. We join a growing chorus of districts and professional associations, including WEA and WSSDA, to expedite and prioritize vaccinations of all K-12 employees as soon as practical as an added layer of protection for students, staff and families.

But to be clear, according to OSPI and the WADOH, mass vaccination is not a condition of re-opening schools.

Slide 2- This slide presents the December 16 WA DOH New Guidance for Providing in Person Learning. As of last week, Clark County was in the MODERATE LEVEL. Today's reported data places the county in the high level category. Regardless of whether or not there is a post New Year's surge in new cases per 100K, the updated guidance allows school districts to begin hybrid learning grades K-5 in the HIGH LEVEL. So, this means we will proceed with our K-5 transition regardless of what happens over the next few weeks.

Slide 3- This slide reports the Clark County COVID-19 activity levels for the last six weeks. As of January 4, CC was just below 325 new cases per 100K. Today's data is 397 new cases per 100K.

Slide 4- This slide reports the Clark County positivity rates. This data lags the COVID-19 Activity Levels. The most current data is 9.41 percent positive, below the 10% target in moderate COVID-19 Activity Level.

Slide 5- This slide identifies the number of students that have received in-person learning support in VPS/partner programs since September 21 in small group pods of 10 or fewer. Approximately 2,000 VPS students have received in-person support in the fall and early

winter. This past week, we added another 800-plus students with the learning pods for our most at-risk and disengaged students.

Slide 6- This slide identifies the reported positive COVID-19 cases from July to January in VPS schools/work sites. This is important data, because the new guidance states that if schools can demonstrate the ability to limit transmission in the school environment, then we should add more grades. As of January 4, 10 students had been identified as COVID-19 positive cases. None were reported as a school based transmission case. Forty-five employees were identified as COVID-19 positive cases. Only four were reported as work based transmission cases. Thousands upon thousands of human interactions daily. Only 4 adult known positive case transmissions in our schools or worksites.

Slide 7 notes the unintended impacts on students due to remote learning related to student success and sense of well-being.

Slide 8 is a summary table and bar graph (previously shared with the Board in a public meeting) showing the increase in MS/HS F rates (students with at least one F grade) for the first reporting window year-over-year and the disproportionate impact on students farthest from educational justice. Unfortunately, remote learning is not working equally well for all of our students despite the heroic work by our staff. Nearly twice as many middle school students received at least one F grade in this marking period year-over-year. High schools students experienced an approximate 50% increase.

Slide 9 is pulled from a national study published by NBC News in December 2020. The source is Mental Health America. COVID-19 is adversely affecting the mental health well-being of our nation's children. The "N" of the teen survey administered to youth with moderate-to-severe depression was 327,000. Nearly 80% of respondents reported that loneliness or isolation was a source of their distress. Sadly, several youth suicides have occurred in Clark County during the pandemic.

Slide 10- Here is my recommended revised reopening timeline, which has been vetted by cabinet and principals. Principals have reported, "We can do this." Our team has discussed the plan with VEA leaders. We slid the grades 1-2 launch dates back by one week from the previously released dates, given feedback from principals. The grades 1-2 hybrid launch is January 25. Because of this change, our elementary team recommended transitioning our kinder pods to kinder hybrid on January 19. This timing provides a soft launch for a five-hour hybrid day from the three-hour small group pod day. February 1 is the launch of grades 3-5 hybrid. We have not established a specific hybrid launch date in February for middle schools and March for high schools. Instead we've linked those transitions to the parameters outlined by the WA DOH. We likely would phase in grade

levels, with 6 and 9 coming in one week prior to the other grades at each respective level. WIAA just released its guidance, so we need more time to evaluate and plan for athletics and activities. If, by Feb. 1, the SW WA region is in phase 2 of the revised WA Safe Start plan released last week by Governor Inslee, we would begin some 9-12 athletics and activities consistent with previously released guidance.

Slide 11- This slide shows the current ANNOUNCED Clark County school district re-opening plans. The takeaway here is that all districts are moving forward with achieving K-5 hybrid learning, roughly on the same trajectory, although in different ways. Camas is transitioning earlier with middle school students. Although not included on this slide, Hockinson, Woodland and Green Mountain are following similar timelines.

Slide 12 is the current WA COVID-19 vaccine plan and phases released last week by Governor Inslee and WA DOH. We know that this is an important part of the equation. In a recent meeting with CCPH, school nurses, health room assistants and COVID-19 isolation room attendants at each school have been identified as A1 “high risk health care workers in health care settings.” Currently, K-12 employees age 50 or over are in the B2 phase, scheduled for February. K-12 employees younger than age 50 are in the B4 phase scheduled for April. There is a growing advocacy sentiment in Olympia that all K-12 employees should be in the B2 phase. Locally, superintendents are partnering with CCPH to develop a more decentralized and rapid vaccination delivery system using our trained nurses, under the supervision of CCPH incident management teams, to administer vaccinations faster. The current clinic/health care setting delivery system has unintentionally created a bottleneck. Points of distribution centers would be set up in several locations throughout the county prioritizing school staff, subject to vaccine supply.

Slide 13- I’ll turn this over to Mike and team to highlight three areas: program, operations, and PPE and safety.

In summary, I understand that there are some who are advocating for a full reopening immediately, K-12, every day. Your voices have been heard. Unfortunately, the current WADOH guidance does not permit this given Clark County current metrics.

I also understand that there are some who are advocating for the district to remain in remote learning for the balance of the school year, or at a minimum, until all staff and students receive vaccinations. Your voices have also been heard. The evidence and science indicate that schools are not a significant source location of COVID transmission so long as students and staff adhere to the CDC COVID mitigation strategies- social distance, wear masks, wash hands, clean and sanitize spaces. Vaccinations at scale are an

added layer of protection creating herd immunity to respond to community based transmission.

Our hybrid reopening plan and schedule is both safe and sensible. And supported by CCPH and consistent with WADOH guidance. We are relying on the experts: scientists, epidemiologists, and public health professionals. They have determined that this course of action is safe.

Our children and youth need to be in school. And they need to be in school as soon as possible consistent with WADOH guidance. This plan achieves that outcome, while providing equitable choice for those families that select all remote, while addressing teacher workload concerns previously expressed.

Our team will respond to questions now.
