

RSSAA Joint College/COVID-19 Task Force/Board Meeting

November 17, 2020

College Attendees:

Paul Trombley (Chair), Wendy Abate, Gary Banks, Anne Birney, Rob White, Noelle Frerichs, Peggy Wilson, Abby Kurlfink, Angela Gladstone, Perla Schaeberle, Karen Sheridan, Sian Owen-Cruise, Yoni Paz, Erica Choberka, Tara McKnight

COVID-19 Task Force Attendees:

Knut Hill, Heather Rindels, Sara Deon, Carolyn Raschke, Jim McCauley, Sian Owen-Cruise, Paul Trombley

Board Attendees:

Don Remboski (Chair), Heather Rindels, Knut Hill, Jim McCauley, Elizabeth Head, Daryl Honor, Gary Banks, Mike McFall, Paul Trombley, Anni Fox Maniglia

Sian Owen-Cruise called the joint College/COVID-19 Task Force/Board meeting to order at 5:34 pm.

The Goal for Tonight is a Group Decision on How to Move Forward Over the Next 3-4 Weeks

Sian noted that the Governor issued a directive for schools and as of Wednesday, November 18, all Michigan High School programs will be remote. This decision has rebuilt some confidence that the State is assisting in decision making.

Background

We will follow all public mandates and health orders while deciding on the best way to move forward. The Board, College and COVID-19 Task Force need to agree on the plan.

If we decide to make changes, we will need to take the days of transition even after the Thanksgiving break. Continued check ins will also be necessary.

Sian presented and reviewed a slide of Things to Consider:

1. Transmission of COVID-19 at school
2. Impact of quarantines on staffing the school
3. Impact of quarantines on students and families
4. Strain on administration in handling quarantines
5. Risk of contracting COVID-19 for more vulnerable faculty and staff
6. Financial impact of moving to remote education
7. Educational impact of moving to remote education
8. Mental health impact of moving to remote
9. Financial impact on faculty and staff

Don Remboski asked about the use of metrics in making decisions. Sian informed the group that we have decided not to use metrics because they do not line up with what our community is experiencing.

The November 16 Parent Survey Responses were then reviewed. There were 199 responses:

- a. 56% support for continuing in current program
- b. 25% support for moving to remote
- c. 22% support for middle path

Faculty/Staff Survey Responses were then reviewed. There were 65 faculty/staff responses:

- a. Close to 3 on a scale of 1-5
- b. There may be errors due to misunderstanding the scale
- c. There may be a few faculty members who move to remote due to their family situations and health concerns

We have 4 options:

1. Move to remote education for the 3 weeks between Thanksgiving and Winter Break and return on January 11, 2021.
2. Continue with in-person school as we are now, including the 3 weeks between Thanksgiving and Winter Break.
3. Mitigate and accept some risk, make Nov 20-Dec 4 remote, continue in-person for Dec 7-18 with changes and some schedules rearranged to mitigate faculty and staff risk.
4. Other Ideas from the Group
 - a. It was noted that working through one of the options above will help us capture the learning and assist us to react more effectively as we progress through the year.
 - b. Given the Governor's order, how can we make different decisions for various levels of the school?

Group Comments and Discussion

- Current State of Michigan High School remote learning directive runs from 11/18/20 – 12/8/20
- Other private schools in our area are following HS directive and other K-Grade 8 schools are continuing with in-person education
- Our sense of community commitment in doing the right thing is that 85% of decision making is going in the correct ways. Our small number of cases (2) in students shows that our parents are working hard to keep children safe. If the group chooses Option 3, this gives us an opportunity to reengage with parents and reiterate our message.
- All the data supports parents wanting to stay in-person.
 - High School attendance was high today (expected since they go remote as of 11/18)
 - Out of 100 students in Grades 1-6, 16 were absent on Monday and 9 absent on Tuesday
 - Out of 50 EC students, 19 were absent on Monday and 15 absent on Tuesday
- There was support in asking people to take some quarantine time after holidays.
- The County Health Department reports that transmission is happening in settings where people do not think it will happen, even meetings with select friends, someone driving students to school, etc.
- Since the symptom check through ParentSquare is successful, can an acknowledgement be added that reiterates a safe action commitment? No, we do not have that capacity unfortunately.
- There was support for taking all precautions and add more planned mitigation, this would be Option 3 with strong focus on risk mitigation.
- Shortage of faculty is a very serious concern and was voiced by several people.
- Should COVID-19 Task Force take on risk mitigation as a firm action item? Yes.
- Children need to be in school in person, via Zoom is just a shadow of our program.
- Mixed feelings about all 3 scenarios because of so many unknowns.
- Rhythm and continuation are important as well as looking at age groups separately.
- Hybrid classes are very difficult to teach and I am afraid of encouraging something that is very difficult.

- How can we address the needs of students with anxiety about going remote? The mental health of our students and the need to be in-person are extremely important. Closing schools is not the answer because this is not where transmissions are happening.
- Science is on our side and supports our ways to mitigate risk.
- Can we be more progressive in trying to stay in person?
- The group was reminded that the mental health concern is applicable to everyone, not just students and that we need to work through this together.

Knut Hill shared feedback he gathered from other parents in the community: the parents he spoke with believe we have a strong program, that in-person learning is an essential service and that a focus on keeping people as safe as possible remain a high priority. He shared that medical experts believe N95 masks are the most effective mask and suggests that we utilize them in school. Overall, the community is very grateful to teachers and staff.

The group then moved to decision-making.

The College of Teachers provided their full, enthusiastic support and approval for Option 3 as outlined below.

On behalf of the Board of Trustees, a motion to approve Option 3 as outlined below was made by Jim McCauley with support from Daryl Honor. There were no dissensions and the motion carried.

Option 3 as adopted by the groups:

- Conduct the week of Nov 30-Dec 4 as remote
- Conduct the weeks of Dec 7 and 14 in person with plans implemented to reduce staff exposure
- Conduct the week of January 4 as remote
- Work with families to help them be part of risk mitigation
- Work internally to increase the level of COVID-19 precautions
- Work with families across the school to emphasize the importance of quarantining (Coordinators, class teachers, etc.)
- COVID-19 Task Force to carry mitigation oversight work

Sian thanked everyone for this work and noted that she will now draft a letter to the community. She requested that the letter be approved by Board Executive, HUB and COVID-19 Task Force so that it can be sent by the end of the day Wednesday.

The group was asked to keep this information confidential until it is made public to all and it was noted that our communication to the community should always emphasize that what we are doing in school is working right now.

Paul Trombley closed the meeting for the College of Teachers. On behalf of the Board of Trustees, a motion to adjourn was made by Elizabeth Head with support from Gary Banks. There were no dissensions and the motion carried.

In closing, Paul Trombley recited a verse and the meeting was adjourned at 7:06pm.