

COVID Q&A with Superintendent Karim Hachlaf (January 13, 2022)

1. What are the financial costs to hire so many more TOCs and EAs, and has there been any discussion with the MoE and / or the BC Government about additional money for school districts to off-set the costs?

This is something we're all facing but currently we're looking at our operational budget. The Federal and Provincial funding has provided past support, which certainly helped with the staffing support of our on-line program a year ago and we're hoping to receive some additional funding for some of the health and safety measures, but at this time our Board recently approved a motion that staff put forth for some additional monies (up to \$500,000) for the additional TOCs and EAs so we could have those people in place. We were thinking ahead and that is what we are doing to prepare.

2. Teachers are, and have been asked, to do a tremendous amount of work here in terms of having lesson plans for face to face and back-up plans if there are functional closures. What are we doing to recognize and support these efforts, both in terms of compensation but also recognizing that burn-out must be a very real possibility for many of our best teachers and educational staff at this point?

Teachers and staff across our schools are feeling that and this restart has been yet another challenge and the delay for a week, although not even close to providing that level of support for teachers, was certainly helpful to give some more time for preparation.

At a District level we continue to provide District level support. The District staff is doing their best to back-fill as well to offset some of those challenges.

With the online component we have a great District resource team that has been providing a lot of the information resources and lesson templates for staff; so we're not reinventing, we're using the collective expertise of the School District. We are monitoring this closely. But in general the burn out is taking a segway into the functional closure. But we are managing and monitoring this as well. There is a long term cost of spreading your staff too thin, trying to keep all schools open when some of the data points don't support that. And that will be reviewed on a daily and weekly basis.

3. If the parents are not getting notification from school, does that mean it will be 'Public

Health' that parents will hear from if our children had a 'low' or 'high' risk exposure to staff/other children who tested positive?

Self management is critical. Schools will not be reporting this and Public Health will not be reporting this. It is on us right now, each individual and individual family unit is to communicate with those who they have had close contact with, and that may shift in practice. Everyone is to follow the self-monitoring guidelines.

We will NOT be taking part in the contact tracing, or reporting those who have tested positive and that is the shift we have received from PH

4. With mental health and physical health being a focus, why, during PE lessons are kindergarten kids and high school kids wearing masks when outside? Why do I see this and why do I have friends who see this?

As an individual parent if you are hearing about that, follow up with the classroom teacher, you did state correctly that it is not a requirement for a child to wear a mask outdoors when exerting physical activity. But we have parents that feel differently about that and we respect that as well. So it is an individual choice, not a requirement.

5. I would like clarity about testing that will be happening at the school and do you feel a functional closure is a self-fulfilling prophecy.

The testing available at our schools right now are the Swish and Gargle tests that give a level of convenience for families who want to feel their child who may be symptomatic requires that test. That particular test is not a rapid antigen test because it needs to be sent to the lab

As mentioned in the update in regards to the rapid antigen test: we're waiting on further guidance from PH, and are expecting those tests to be available along with guidance, very soon. Those tests are going to be for symptomatic individuals and the first phase will be for staff, not students.

An update will be provided as soon as we have it

There is no self-fulfilling prophecy for functional school closures. We are optimistic; with the staffing levels we're seeing and the work we're doing we hope to see a decline next week and in the weeks to come

6. If functional closures begin to happen, will there be a priority to keep some classes open or are all equal. There is real concern for grade 12 students.

Good questions, when it comes to the secondary school that is a different component. We have greater capacity given the size to work there.

The likelihood of closing the entire secondary school is very very rare. We have staff

that can provide online support as well, and as noted, we've already lost a week due to the delay impacting all students particularly grade 12's. We are doing everything we can to continue that Continuity of instruction for all of our senior students, especially our Grade 12's.

For elementary, middle and secondary schools there are unique strategies across the grade groupings that factor into a functional closure.

7. Will parents get notification if the school staff/teacher/students get positive tests.

No

8. Can we have consistency for substitute teachers ? My student has already had several different subs this week which adds to COVID risk .

Ideally, this would be the best scenario. Realistically, with the shortages we're facing, this has been challenging. We're doing our best and dealing with the shortages which as stated has been a challenge

If we know a staff member may need to take a multi-day absence we are doing our best to consistently provide a TOC for that period of time without interruptions.

With some of the shortages we may from time to time make moves across the district. It is not ideal but we are not working in an ideal situation right now.

We are seeing fluctuation in high absenteeism, we've been able to manage, but we're monitoring that capacity very carefully.

9. I understand that non-medical grade level 3 masks are recommended, but is there any guidance to students using fabric masks. Does the administration ask these students to change to the masks being offered?

Reminders are out there, we've done the reminders with all of our staff to encourage & educate our students.

Why we have the other mask available to - we are putting that information out at the school level (from principals) and from the District level (District website)

Work together to educate & make sure people know that

we're trying our best to follow the recommendations and make sure their mask at least follows the minimum requirements and that's the approach we're taking.

On the other end of the spectrum, while we're not providing N95 masks, that doesn't prevent, if that's a wish of an individual, to wear one either.

10. We prefer to get informed if people in the same classroom get positive tests, that will help to prevent more spread of this virus.

As stated in the meeting earlier, contact tracing is not being done by Fraser Health and we are following the guidelines of the PHO

11. We are at the end of the first week of in person learning now. If the status quo continues as it is now in our district and schools but we see other district closures, do we follow suit or is it up to our district and/or each school to decide to go for online learning? Also, will this be different for elementary vs high school?

Yes, monitor closely with Elementary, Middle and Secondary schools, each having their own unique set of challenges. Obviously with smaller children and the ability to have face to face is important. But it is a district decision and we monitor that site by site. The District staff coordinates with the school administration and we monitor that, but it would not compare us to any other District. Each district runs it's process a little bit differently to adjust to our local community contacts.

12. Is New Westminster thinking of following Delta's lead with having a vaccine declaration for teachers?

I won't be able to comment on that at this time. The decision was made just recently by the Delta School Board Trustees. This decision is made by the Board of Education with consultation and guidance from Public Health and as it stands there has not been a discussion on this topic here in New Westminster.

I assumed that superintendents and principals would have that data for their own schools that they operate

13. How are the NW schools measuring the psychological damage that masks, social distancing, etc. are having on our kids and their IQ's. Are we seeing lower learning scores?

Don't think we're using Intelligent tests in that fashion, we recognize that the disruption over the last couple of years has had an impact; it's had an impact on students and adults. That is why we are prioritizing those mental health supports, making sure we have the programs available for students as we still work through the Pandemic and on Lens I wish to take is: we're really wanting to focus on the depth and continuity of learning. It's not about a "hurry up" offense to cover everything in a shorter period of

time, but to go deeper in the learning - whether in kindergarten or Grade 12, it's about greater depth in the learning.

The approach and teacher expertise we have supported by our EAs and supplemented that.

The School District does have a holistic approach.