

Council of Key Communicators
May 18, 2020
Meeting Highlights and Action Items

Hampton Happenings

Remote Learning/End of School Year

Dr. Loughead gave the Council an end-of-school-year overview:

- The District will end formal instruction on May 29 for all students except seniors, who will finish May 22, this coming Friday.
- There are no final exams this year.
- The last week of school is a Paws Week. This initiative will give students time to complete any missing assignments, and enable teachers to calculate grades under the modified pass/fail system the District is using for the last marking period. The pass/fail system will apply to any student taking a high school level course, including 8th graders.

Diploma Award Ceremony

Dr. Loughead shared the news that graduating seniors will receive their diplomas at a June 4 ceremony at Fridley Field. The District has been working with the Allegheny County Health Department to find a safe way to hold a Diploma Award Ceremony, and learned that the ceremony can take place, pending adherence to several safety guidelines. He shared the details that are known at this time:

- There can be no more than 25 people on the field at any given time, and everyone will be required to wear a mask.
- Each graduate will be allowed to have four family members present.
- Graduates and their families will stay in their cars to wait their turn. Then, four families will be allowed on the field at any given time.
- High School Principal Dr. Marguerite Imbarlina, Dr. Loughead, and a few other administrators will be there to congratulate the graduates.
- There will be flowers, music, and time for families to take photos.
- After students receive their diplomas, they and their families will leave the field and the next group of families will enter the field.
- In order to comply with restrictions on the number of people on the field, the band will not be present.
- Police will help control traffic.
- The entire program will be broadcast via Facebook Live.
- Detailed information will soon go out to families.

8th Grade Recognition “Drive Through”

Eighth-graders will be recognized for their achievements during a “Drive Through” celebratory program this week. Teachers will line the middle school driveway and cheer while families drive through and students receive awards and a cup of candy. Photos will be shared on the District’s social media pages.

Other End-of-Year Celebrations

Dr. Loughead noted that other schools are also doing drive-bys to mark the end of the school year. Families may drive past the school and wave to teachers, for example. These are more informal events, he said, and they are allowed and encouraged, provided safety measures are followed.

Student Belongings Retrieval

Dr. Loughead and Dr. Cunningham said students at all District schools will be permitted to enter their schools one last time this spring to retrieve any items left behind when schools were closed. Principals will communicate the details directly to families. The custodial staff will continue to wipe down surfaces during this time. Everyone must wear masks and enter and exit quickly without lingering. Elementary students need to be accompanied by one parent; secondary students will enter the building on their own, but staff members will help to make sure they maintain social distancing and collect all of their belongings.

Electronic Devices

The District is allowing students to keep their District-issued electronic devices over the summer, Dr. Loughead said. This will allow them to keep learning over the summer and ensure they are prepared for fall, in the event that school buildings remain closed due to COVID-19. A brief collection of some devices may be required for software updates, after which they will be returned to students, he said.

High School Project Design Updates

The design of the high school improvement project continues, despite the 2020-2021 budget challenges that Hampton and all school districts are facing, Dr. Loughead said. In late August or early September, he hopes the District will present a final vision of what the high school might look like, even though the timeline for completion will likely be different. He told Council Members they may be invited to participate in a feedback process as well.

2020-2021 Budget Update

Dr. Loughead provided a list of reasons for the current financial strain.

On the revenue side:

- Earned income tax revenues are projected to be significantly lower due to the COVID-19 related economic slowdown.
- A decrease in the investment income the District normally relies on is also anticipated.
- Because the State of Pennsylvania is also experiencing financial difficulties, the District expects basic education funding to stay flat at best.

On the expenditure side:

- While some potential savings is likely due to a decrease in busing, the school closure, and the District's plan to essentially mothball most buildings for the summer, faculty is a district's largest expense, and Act 13 requires that all faculty receive their full salaries.

The combination of these factors may require the District to borrow from the fund balance, raise taxes, or a combination of both, even though officials would rather not do either. The School Board has directed the Administration not to cut the academic program, Dr. Loughead noted.

2020-2021 Planning for School Year Reopening

Devising a Reopening Plan for Health, Safety, and Effective Instruction

Dr. Loughead and Dr. Cunningham said the District has already begun thinking about a reopening plan for next school year, even while waiting for guidance from the Pennsylvania Secretary of Education, which is expected in June.

Dr. Loughead said while the state can give advice based on best practices, many decisions will have to be made locally, based on local conditions and whether a county is in the red, yellow, or green phase of reopening. He noted that there is good cooperation among superintendents throughout Allegheny County, which is important since they will all face similar conditions.

Efforts will focus on health and safety, including protocols for school health offices and nurses and the cleanliness of buildings.

Dr. Cunningham is leading the District's planning for the potential fall re-opening. She will be working with principals, teachers, administration and staff to plan for the best course of action for different possible scenarios, including:

- A return to face-to-face instruction.
- A continuation of virtual learning.
- A blending of the two, or switching between periods of in-school and at-home instruction.

Any plan must take into account the needs of students, teachers, and staff, and must foster both safety and the delivery of instruction, she said.

Dr. Loughead noted that public access to schools will likely be less accessible for the duration of the pandemic. He said front office staff will probably require special safeguards, such as Plexiglas screening and personal protective equipment. The District, and other school districts, donated their PPE to hospitals, he said. Schools will need masks and other PPE to keep everyone safe when schools reopen, and he is encouraging the state to buy PPE to distribute to school districts so that the state's districts are not competing with each other to purchase supplies.

Hampton Online Academy

Dr. Loughead noted that whenever buildings re-open for in-person instruction, some families or children might be out of school for extended periods, and the District is determining how to give them as much electronic access to learning as possible. The Hampton Online Academy, a virtual learning academy that is already an option for Hampton families, may prove to be the best option, he said.

Some families who would otherwise prefer in-person instruction may opt for virtual instruction this coming year as a way to deal with the uncertainty of COVID-19, Dr. Loughead said. The District must take steps to ensure these families know about the Hampton Online Academy, which provides students with a Hampton-quality education. Because Hampton principals and

guidance counselors manage the Academy, students who take this option can easily return to Hampton's brick and mortar schools. They can also participate in Hampton's extracurricular activities. Those students in the Hampton Online Academy also earn a Hampton diploma.

Cyber charter schools offer none of those benefits, Dr. Loughead said. Public school districts must pay the tuition of any of their students who attend a charter school, which is incredibly expensive.

Dr. Loughead asked communication consultant Leza Raffel, President of Communication Solutions Group, Inc., to help the District inform families about the Hampton Online Academy.

Distance Learning Observations and Suggestions from Committee Members

The parents on the committee raised several points for the Administration's consideration:

- Students really want to return to school in the fall. Please update families as soon as possible as to the District's plans.

- While everyone appreciates the tremendous amount of effort distance learning takes and the opportunities it has afforded students, there is some room for improvement, parents said. The most common request was to ask the teachers to use digital learning platforms in more similar ways, and to be consistent about how students are alerted to work assignments. Parents also asked for more live and recorded video lessons, which allow students to talk to their teachers and watch them demonstrate lessons, such as how to solve a certain type of math problem.

- Some parents on the council praised the bond that teachers had developed with students before schools closed, and had some concerns that if the new school year begins with at-home instruction, that bond would not yet have been established and result in a bumpier start. Dr. Loughead agreed with this assessment that the student-teacher bond is an important component.

Dr. Loughead said each school is gathering data from faculty about what worked and what could be improved, and faculty, too, see the need for consistency.

Shout Out to Teachers

- Parents gave compliments to two teachers for extraordinary remote instruction:
 - Honors Biology Teacher Miss Foley teaches at a college level and provided videos of the lessons.
 - Mr. Himmler sent every band student a hand-written note telling them how proud he is of them. He also taught extremely meaningful lessons that went beyond practicing instruments.

Dr. Loughead thanked the parents for their comments about the teachers. He added his own praise, and announced to the group that the Visual Arts Department's 2020 submission to the District's permanent art gallery is a painting of a student wearing a graduation cap and gown and a white mask.

Assessing Student Progress

Dr. Loughead said the new school year will begin with assessing students in the primary grades to see where they are academically. He again praised the District team for its quick launch of remote learning, noting that other districts went three or four weeks without instruction. Still, he said, some students probably are not where they should be academically due to the school closure. He said students who are a bit behind will receive extra support to catch up.

Summer Food Program

Dr. Loughead said the District plans to continue offering free breakfast and lunches through the summer. Details will be forthcoming.

The Food Bank will complement the breakfast and lunch plan by offering a free dinner program, which will operate at Central Elementary.

North Hills Community Outreach will also be collecting items for the Food Bank at Central.

Academics

Dr. Loughead reported that the Pittsburgh Business Times ranked Hampton High School as the 5th Best High School. He said that while such rankings as this and the #1 in Pittsburgh that Hampton High received from U.S. News and World Report are not everything, they are a good indicator of District performance. He noted that based on comments he has received at national events and presentations he has been invited to make, Hampton's reputation for excellence is growing nationally.

Dr. Loughead applauded Hampton High School math teacher Kathy Dickensheets for her Teacher of the Year nomination.

Athletics

Dr. Loughead said the upcoming future of athletics is uncertain at this time, which is understandable considering the close contact athletes have during practice and games. Greater availability of quick-result tests might help open sports, he noted.

General Questions and Comments

- Key Communicators had a question about the YMCA programs. Dr. Loughead noted that while the YMCA's Base Program and Kindergarten Wrap programs are held in single locations, they are open to all students, District-wide, and transportation is provided to and from the home school of any child who does not go to school at the location.
- Key Communicators asked that if the District was considering reducing in-person attendance by staggering physical attendance on days in the fall, that siblings be allowed to attend school on the same day. Both Dr. Cunningham and Dr. Loughead noted the important point to help families, and indicated that other families had expressed the same concern.

- The District is progressing toward a website update, which the Council said is especially important now that communication between the District and families is so vital.
- The Hampton Magazine will be a tribute to the class of 2020.
- Key Communicators asked if a Zoom meeting could be set up to discuss progress and options on a digital PTO directory.

Dr. Loughead thanked all participants for their feedback.