



Council of Key Communicators
Monday, February 22, 2021
Zoom Call
9:00 a.m.



Introductions: Key Communicators welcomed Kate McKelvey from Poff and HTSD School Board Representative Denise Balason.

Hampton Happenings

Decision-Making Process for Next Phase of Reopening: Dr. Loughead reviewed Allegheny County's rate of transmission model and how the county had remained in the "Substantial" rate of transmission for quite some time. Last Friday, the Allegheny County COVID-19 dashboard recorded that the positivity rate was 6% and the case count fell below 100. Those two indicators are tracked and thresholds have to be met in order to move out of Substantial transmission. Based on these last statistics, the county is now in the Moderate rate of transmission. Currently, however, the school districts are still held to the Attestation Orders, which include guaranteed masking, six feet of social distance at lunch, and closure guidelines when the number of cases in a school reaches a certain number through a 14 day rolling average. In order to be formally released from the Attestation Order and the corresponding mandates stated previously, the county must be in the Moderate rate of transmission for 2 weeks. Dr. Loughead stated that the positivity rate is encouraging because it is much lower; however, the case count number is still a bit high and we are seeing about 300 cases a week in the county. If the numbers continue to come down, we will have more flexibility because school districts will be released from the Attestation Orders.

Comparison of CDC and PDE Reopening Guidelines: Dr. Loughead reported that last week a large amount of information from the Center for Disease Control (CDC) was distributed. These guidelines mark the first time that we have received definitive information from this organization. Last Tuesday, Dr. Loughead also met with Matt Stemm, the Deputy Secretary of Education from the Pennsylvania Department of Education, and Special Assistant Smith to discuss the impact of the CDC guidelines on local schools. He is expecting to hear how the Pennsylvania guidelines may shift to parallel the CDC guidelines. There are no substantial changes currently, as the Department of Education is digesting that information and making some determinations for schools. Dr. Loughead explained that the CDC guidelines have four stages of transmission (High, Substantial, Moderate, and Low) whereas the Pennsylvania guidelines have three stages of transmission (Substantial, Moderate, and Low). If we placed the Allegheny County numbers on the current CDC model, Allegheny County would remain in the Substantial rate of transmission. He relayed that even if one indicator (percentage rate or case count) was in a higher category, the county would be designated with that higher rate of transmission. The CDC guidelines also addresses sports, and recommends that districts not engage in sports until they are designated in the Moderate or Low transmission rate.

Dr. Loughead pointed to the success that Hampton has had with full in-person learning at the elementary level, and how the Allegheny Department of Health is supportive of this level of in-person instruction based upon the successful mitigation strategies that the District had put into place. However, the CDC recommends that districts move to full, in-person learning at the elementary level only when the county is in the Moderate rate of

transmission according to their metrics. Dr. Loughead indicated that all of this information is important to digest, and that the challenge is how to navigate the guidelines and work with the local Department of Health. As other districts are thinking about more in-person days, Dr. Loughead pointed to the fact that Hampton is one of the few districts which has maintained in-person learning. As we move through this next phase of understanding the guidelines and options that we have, our next step may be to survey our community and faculty and staff and pose some questions regarding next steps. He shared with the Key Communicators that he realizes that some secondary families wish to increase the number of in-person learning days, and some families are quite content with the current Enhanced Hybrid Model. The plan is to discuss these options at the March 1 Board Meeting and then return on March 8 with next steps. Overall, Dr. Loughead stated that things are looking much better now, but there is a lot of new information to digest on what is best for the middle school and high school. He reminded the Key Communicators that we are still seeing 2-3 cases each week at the high school (as we are seeing in other local high schools), and are conducting contact tracing, isolation, and quarantining measures. Under the current Enhanced Hybrid Model, we only have to quarantine a handful of students each time because we are adhering to six feet of social distance. If we bring more students into the school, we would not be able to uphold six feet of space, and may have to quarantine many more students.

Key Communicators agreed that it would be important to indicate that information to families in a survey so that families know that their student may have to be quarantined if more students returned to additional days of in-person learning and social distancing was reduced. Dr. Loughead agreed, and noted that students are very invested in sports and the musical, and a quarantine would be difficult at this time of year for them. He agreed that the overall hope is that if the county moves out of the Substantial rate of transmission into the Moderate rate of transmission, that we would see fewer cases at the secondary level, but that has not been the case as of yet.

Key Communicators encouraged Dr. Loughead to phrase survey questions carefully so that parents understand that the survey is for information gathering only, not decision making for the district. Dr. Loughead agreed that the school board and the superintendent are ultimately responsible for the decision about in-person learning, with guidance from the health department. Key Communicators suggested that clear communications to families are the key to successful next steps, as families are interested in how decisions are being made and what options they may have, given their own set of circumstances and the health and well-being of their children.

Key Communicators also asked whether the students would be required to complete standardized testing in the spring. Dr. Loughead responded that right now, we do not have a waiver from the federal government and so standardized testing is expected to continue this spring. If a waiver is available, he believes the Pennsylvania Department of Education would apply for the waiver. We are awaiting additional guidelines on how to conduct testing based on remote and in-person learning.

Review of Equity and Inclusion Update: Dr. Loughead shared with the Key Communicators that Hampton has been thoughtfully working on equity and inclusion for many years, but last week was the first time recently that this work has been shared at the Board level. He related that Dr. Chuck and Dr. Christine Herring have been working with us to guide the work regarding treating all students with dignity and respect. He indicated that some community members were under the impression that the Herrings were doing curricular work; however, he reminded the Key Communicators that curriculum is designed based on standards and through a textbook approval process. The training that the Herrings are conducting is for teachers and members of the administration to help us recognize our own biases and blind spots and making sure that all students feel

respected. The Herrings are also working with some of our student groups to help them become affiliated with other groups in the region who are doing the same work.

Key Communicators wondered if parents are thinking that some of the topics before the Board are new topics and do not realize that the Board has been researching and working on some of these issues for several years. As an example, they referred to the School Start Time plans and how the District had been studying school start times for several years before the plan was approved at the Board level previously. Dr. Loughead agreed and also highlighted that the work with the Herrings was approved by the Board previously in addition to annual goals on Dignity and Respect.

Teacher Vaccination Update: Dr. Loughead reported that Hampton is involved with a county-wide effort to get teachers and staff vaccinated. A robust plan has been devised and is ready to be implemented as soon as our area moves into the 1B phase. Some of our staff who are in category 1A have already been vaccinated through their own providers.

Safety and Security Discussion: Dr. Cunningham reported that the District is always looking at safety and security. Recently we were fortunate to have a team from the state police review facilities with our administration. Dr. Cunningham stated that the District Safety Team will be convening in the near future to analyze the results and make recommendations for improvements to our facilities.

High School Renovation Update: Dr. Loughead complimented Ms. Balason for all of her work on the high school renovation project and indicated that the next phase of work included stormwater runoff mitigation strategies, vehicular flow around the high school, expanded parking which would enable the band to practice all year, and work on new entrances to the high school. There would be multiple approvals which would need to be addressed as this work begins; however, he anticipates that construction would begin this summer. Additionally, the roof will be a top priority; construction with the roof will begin right after school is out and will take longer than one summer to complete. Currently, the architects are meeting with the teachers on the new library and media space so that it meets the needs of the students. They are also working with Dr. McKaveney and his team on a new server room.

Planning for Spring Events: Dr. Imbarlina is currently working with parents around events such as prom in order to uphold safety guidelines. The District is planning for an on-time and outdoor graduation; however, there may be limitations on attendance and most likely social distancing on the field.

Academics

School Start Time Update: Dr. Loughead reported that members of the administration are currently working through details to support the new School Start Times for next fall. There will be changes to the schedule, and Beattie students will be attending A.W. Beattie in the morning instead of the afternoon. Key Communicators encouraged Dr. Loughead to make sure that these details and start times are prominently displayed on the HTSD website.

Key Communicators were curious about the progress on the new HTSD website. Dr. Loughead responded that the final design is being approved and the team is working on a strategy to navigate to the new website after school is out for the summer.

Arts

Tentative Plans for HHS Musical: Dr. Loughead relayed that the Health Department has cautioned school districts to be careful regarding musical practices and performances, and has recommended that there be at least ten feet of distance when students are singing. Currently the team is thinking through how the musical, which has been rescheduled for May, can be viewed by the audience. In the meantime, the students are working hard at practice and we want to honor that talent.

Athletics

Winter Sports Playoff Update and Universal Masking Order: Winter sports have had a complicated journey this year with inconsistent rules for masking – all of which has been frustrating for families and for the area superintendents. Currently, the PIAA has stated that masks are mandatory in the playoffs and students have to have individual waivers for any exceptions. The WPIAL organization has not adopted this stance as of yet, and so a team cannot refuse to play a team who is not wearing masks. Despite this challenge, our student athletes are doing well this year and are competitive. Additionally, our athletic trainers have been diligent about quarantining students so that we can keep our teams safe with few breaks in practices.

Questions and Comments

Key Communicators indicated that families are starting to think about instructional options for next year and what HOA might look like. Additional discussions revolved around electronic options for payments for PTOs and resources for 501c3 organizations.

Upcoming District Events

- 3/1 Board Work Session Meeting, 7:00 p.m., Middle School Auditorium
- 3/8 Board Voting Meeting, 7:30 p.m., Middle School Auditorium
- 3/15 Key Communicators
- 3/22 Board Special Meeting (if necessary), 7:00 p.m., Middle School Auditorium