

The Board Report

Monday March 29, 2021



Disclaimer: The Board Report is a synopsis of the Hampton Township School Board meetings and is not intended as a replacement for any official Board minutes.

~ A Tradition of Excellence ~

The Hampton Township Board of School Directors

Bryant Wesley II, Esq.

Mrs. Jill Hamlin

Ms. Denise Balason

Mr. Matt Jarrell*

Mrs. Joy Midgley

Mr. Larry Vasko

Mr. Robert Shages**

Mr. Greg Stein

Mrs. Trisha Webb

Board President

Board Vice President

Board Secretary/Facilities Chair

Transportation Chair

Personnel Chair

Finance Chair

Board Treasurer/Policy & Legislative Affairs Chair

Technology Chair

Student Affairs Chair

** absent*

*** attended remotely*

This Hampton Township Board Meeting was held in the Hampton Middle School Auditorium. The meeting was audio/video simulcast so that community members could watch remotely, and was also audio/video recorded.

Members of Administration in Attendance

Dr. Michael Loughead

Dr. Rebecca Cunningham

Dr. Ed McKaveney

Mr. Josh Kellogg

Superintendent of Schools

Assistant Superintendent of Schools

Director of Technology

Technology Services Network Administrator

Special Board Meeting

March 29, 2021

A video recording of the meeting can be viewed [here](#). The time within the video that each section begins is indicated below.

Opening

00:00

Mr. Wesley opened the meeting and introduced Dr. Loughead to give a presentation on the Amended Reopening Plan and the Updated Health and Safety Plan. Mr. Wesley added that public comment would be taken after the presentations.

Educational Programs

1:23

Amended Reopening Plan

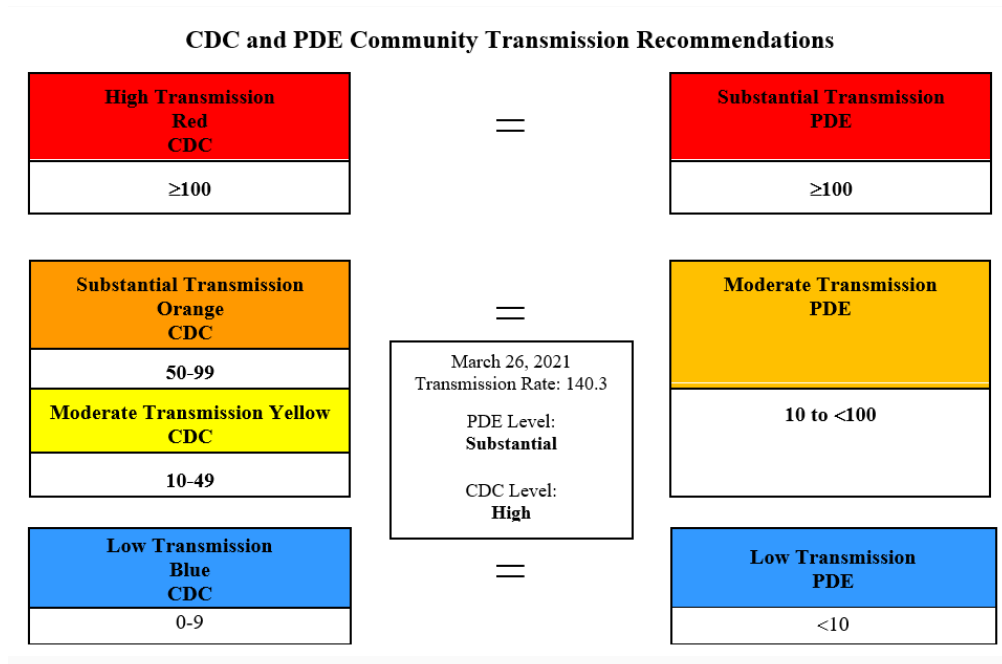
At the beginning of the presentation, Dr. Loughead said that the recent increase in county cases of COVID-19 had prompted changes to the Reopening Plan which was previously shared with the community last week.

Case numbers in the county had been declining, and the county transmission rate had dropped to “moderate;” however, the case count had started to increase, and now it appears that the rate of transmission will be returning to “Substantial.” In light of this recent information, a new version of the plan has been created for this evening’s presentation.

In his presentation Dr. Loughead outlined the following:

- A history of recent events and the District’s response:
 - In November, based on increased spread in the county, Hampton had to sign an Attestation Agreement with the Pennsylvania Department of Education before the District could return students to in-person instruction, with secondary schools using the enhanced hybrid model. Students returned on December 10.
 - The District recognized guidelines from the CDC and Pennsylvania Department of Education regarding tracking case counts. Though similar, the two systems use slightly different terminology.

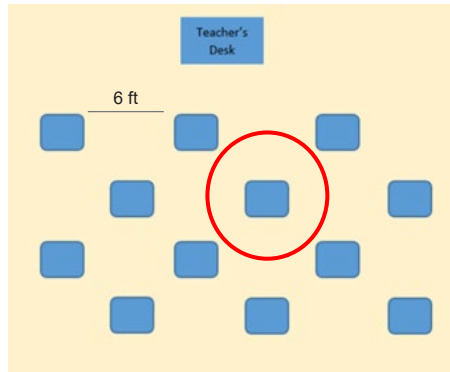
CDC and PDE Community Transmission Recommendations



- When the county experienced a lower rate of spread, some requirements from the state were eased on March 1. If the spread continues to increase and is considered “Substantial” by the Pennsylvania Department of Education, the related mandates from the Attestation Agreement would return. These mandates include universal masking, 6 feet of social distancing during meals, and school closures based on case count. These were the rules the schools operated under for several months.
 - The rules stipulated in the Attestation Agreement have to be followed to allow schools to open for any in-person instruction. It is anticipated that the Attestation Agreement will go back into effect following the county release of COVID case numbers on Friday.
- Considerations from CDC guidance released on March 19, 2021:
 - With low, moderate, or substantial spread of COVID in a community, the CDC recommended that schools could return to having only 3 feet of social distancing among students. However, at the secondary level, student cohorts are needed to reduce social distancing to 3 feet during “high” transmission.
 - This shift provided the District more flexibility to consider returning all secondary students to full-time, in-person instruction as case counts in the county were declining. However, case counts are now increasing, making the guidance less applicable for the current moment.
- Challenges to reopening
 - Contract tracing remains an involved and lengthy process. Students who spend more than 15 minutes within 6 feet of an infected student have to quarantine. This is a mandate from the Allegheny County Health Department and is not optional. No flexibility to change this mandate has been provided. Decreasing the space between desks would increase the number of students needing to quarantine when a case occurs.

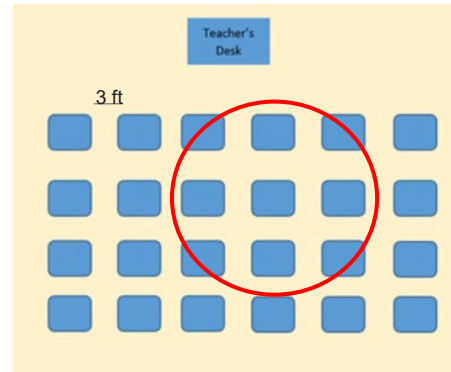
Secondary Classroom Quarantine Scenario

Hybrid Classroom



0 students quarantined

Full In-Person Classroom



8 students potentially quarantined

- Since students must maintain 6 feet of separation during lunch, the District has explored tents, eating in gymnasiums, and the ability for physical education classes to occur outside in order to meet this challenge.
 - The CDC’s guidance on shrinking social distancing from 6 feet to 3 feet during the class day for students not in a cohort (which is the current configuration for elementary school students, not secondary students) is based on the rate of disease spread in the community. If disease transmission increases to high or substantial levels, the recommendation is to keep 6 feet of distance between students.
- The current plan
 - The District will continue to watch transmission rates per 100,000 people in the county. If community transmission rates drop to below 100 cases per 100,000 by April 9, then there will be an asynchronous day to rearrange classroom furniture on April 9, 2021 and all secondary students would return to school for in-person instruction starting April 12.

April 2021						
S	M	T	W	T	F	S
				1	2	3
4	5	B 6	A 7	A 8	Remote Learning (Asynchronous) Day for MS & HS 9	10

- If the rate does not drop below 100 cases per 100,000, then the District will continue watching transmission rates the next week. If the transmission rate declines to fewer than 100 per 100,000 by April 16, secondary students could return to full in-person instruction on April 19. Additionally, there would be a review of data and a discussion on next steps at the Board's meeting on April 12.

April 2021						
S	M	T	W	T	F	S
				1	2	3
4	5	B 6	A 7	A 8	Remote Learning (Asynchronous) Day for MS & HS 9	10
11	A 12	B 13	B 14	A 15	B 16	17

- Once the decision is made to reopen fully, there would not be a shifting between hybrid and full-time, in-person instruction on a week-by-week basis. The goal continues to be bringing students back for full-time, in-person instruction but only when that return could be for the rest of the school year.

In response to questions from Board Members, Dr. Loughead relayed the following information:

- At this stage, the District plans to continually reassess the reopening plan as new numbers are released each week. There also are Board meetings in April where changes could be discussed.
- Middle School students are not in cohorts the way that elementary school students are, and it would be incredibly disruptive, and likely not possible, to implement a cohort system at this point in the school year with the current level of staffing. The CDC recommends schools with cohorts can use 3 feet of social distancing even when community transmission is substantial or high as the same groups of students would be kept together.
- Based on discussions with other superintendents, many districts are taking a similar approach to reopening. Some districts have been more aggressive with a return to full, in-person instruction and have had to close buildings or put large numbers of students in quarantine.
- There may be some flexibility in terms of closing a school based on the number of cases, however, no flexibility has been granted from the Allegheny County Health Department regarding when students have to quarantine. The District legally has to follow this rule as it is in the state's universal masking order and supported by the Allegheny County Health Department.

- Hampton and other districts have asked for changes to quarantine rules and continue to ask, but the Health Department has not changed the rules. However, the District does appreciate everything the Health Department has done to support schools.
- Keeping students at 6 feet of social distancing in classrooms means fewer students need to be in quarantine when a case occurs. There were three student cases at the high school last week where no other students needed to quarantine.
- The idea of moving students around in their classrooms every 10 minutes to prevent 15 minutes of exposure would be disruptive.
- Students who have been fully vaccinated or who have had COVID within the last 90 days do not have to quarantine following an in-school exposure.
- It would not be possible to bring back students (who have had the disease or the vaccine) as adding any additional students would make it impossible to have the 6 feet of separation.
- Dr. Loughead hopes that some sort of accommodation or makeup will be provided for students who miss standardized tests, like AP exams, because of quarantine, but additional research would need to be done to confirm that possibility.

Board Members and Dr. Loughead acknowledged that this decision continues to be a frustrating situation with many possible answers. Teachers want to see students return to the classroom, but the goal continues to be to do this safely and with little disruption. They thanked the teachers, administrators and staff for all their work and the efforts that have been made during the pandemic and reopening discussion. Dr. Loughead also thanked Allegheny County Health Department officials for their work to vaccinate teachers and staff.

Dr. Loughead also clarified the following information:

- If the County returns to “Substantial” spread, the District will have to follow rules regarding building closures and continue the 6 feet of separation at lunch and masking practices.
- Meeting distance requirements during meals will be easier with better weather and the ability to use gyms as meal space while physical education classes take place outside.
- Mandates from the Allegheny County Health Department are not voluntary, even if they are referred to as guidelines, they are legal requirements for public schools.
- There could be a discussion among Board and District officials about the range of positive cases in the community, as many elements of the reopening plan review the case count per 100,000 people. Currently, the tipping point is considered to be 100 positive cases per 100,000 people. However, when looking at bringing students back for full time, in-person instruction holding at 104 cases could be a different circumstance than having 150 cases per 100,000.

Amended Health and Safety Plan

1:02:50

Dr. Loughead said that the Health and Safety Plan also needs to be updated. The District is requesting a change in its masking requirement to stipulate the kinds of masks worn and to exclude

the use of gaiters, bandanas or vented masks to reflect CDC guidance. The other proposed change will allow for the potential of reducing social distancing from 6 feet to 3 feet in the future if all students return to full-time, in-person instruction at the secondary level.

Board Members added that the whole situation is difficult. Everyone is trying to do the right thing to balance the need to have students back in class with safety considerations, and thoughts about the ability to continue having extracurricular activities. They thanked everyone involved for their patience and the work they have been doing.

Mr. Wesley said that the updated reopening plan as previously distributed needed to be amended to account for the most recent changes between last week and this week.

He opened the floor for public comment before the Board voted on the plan.

Public Comment

1:08:11

Community Member and High School Student

- It has been great to have access to band and some of the extracurriculars that have been available this school year, and it would be really upsetting to lose access to those programs because of widespread quarantine, especially for seniors. He asked what is being done to prevent events like the musical or prom from being canceled if widespread quarantines occur.
- If it would be possible to push back the potential return to full-time, in-person instruction further from the end of spring break if the District saw a spike in cases.
- If there is data that supports the possibility of returning all secondary students and maintaining low in-school disease spread.

Dr. Loughead responded that the District had initially planned to return on April 12, which is a week after the end of spring break, exactly because of incidents like the spikes seen following previous breaks. He added that the District is being as careful as possible to prevent the need to cancel spring events. The CDC provided this as an option and the Health Department says using all mitigation practices can reduce the risk of in-school spread, but it cannot be eliminated completely.

Board Members added these are issues they are all thinking about and that high school students can help by following mitigation practices.

Community Member

1:14:00

- What support is in place for students who feel unsafe coming back to full-time, in-person school? She asked if there is an option for students who do not want to risk ending up in quarantine other than HOA, as that program does not have AP classes and there are only seven weeks left in the year.

- The situation is not an easy one, she said. But she would strongly encourage an option for these students.

Dr. Loughhead said that at this time, when the District returns to full-time, in-person instruction, students will have two options: coming to school for class or taking part in the HOA.

Community Member

1:18:00

- Extracurricular activities aside, she thought, there are a lot of students who struggle during remote learning and really need the support of in-person classes. Academic considerations should be the priority, she said.
- Thank you to the District for its adoption of masks, desk shields, and the safety measures that have been taken so far.

Community Member

1:19:05

- Is there any possibility of bringing back the sixth and ninth grade students for full-time, in-person instruction and then phasing in the other grades?
- Are the numbers the District shares every Friday representative of the actual number of people who have tested positive, or do they include presumptive positive cases?

Dr. Loughhead said that phasing in grades is not a plan currently being considered because the space for physical distancing in classrooms and buildings remains the same. If there comes a point when it appears safe to bring back students without the 6 feet of social distancing in the classroom, the goal will be to bring back as many students as possible, not just a few grades. He said that the information shared is from the Allegheny County Health Department COVID-19 Dashboard. He added that he was not completely sure which numbers are included in that count and would need to check to prevent misspeaking on the issue.

Community Member

1:21:35

- Why there appeared to be so much negativity about the possibility of returning all secondary students to full-time, in-person instruction. The goal for parents is the best education for their students and while having more students in classes is a risk, everything in life has risk, he said. His feeling is that most parents and students want to return to class.
- He asked if anyone on the Board thought remote learning was better than in-person instruction. He believes kids need the social interaction that being in class provides.
- He asked if the District solicitor represented any other school districts in the area and what they are doing in terms of returning students.
- Why, if other school districts are returning students to the classroom, that is not happening at Hampton.

- The District needs to be more creative about the options it proposes, he said.
- He had heard that teachers also want students to be back in the classroom as many students are struggling.
- That he was not discounting the reality of COVID, it is a serious disease, but students are less likely to face serious health complications from the disease. Kids are playing outside with no social distancing and that is great, he said.
- He said the District needs to listen to the parents, and the majority want their kids back in school full-time.

Community Member

1:32:28

- Everyone is talking about the issues of disruptions from quarantine if all students return, but the hybrid system is already quite disruptive.
- Students have little risk of getting the disease in school with all the mitigation practices in place, and the risk of having to quarantine her student would be preferable to the current system if the student could have more in-class school days.

Community Member

1:35:10

- Had the District considered planning a series of asynchronous days with students learning remotely on Friday? This schedule could be a way to continually reset the case count and prevent schools from having to be closed based on the number of COVID cases in the rolling 14-day window. This type of setup might allow students to constantly be in school Monday through Thursday and reset numbers by being out on Friday.

Community Member

1:36:48

- Students who would not struggle if they were in class every day are struggling in the hybrid system. Sports are going forward, and student athletes are much closer than they would be in a classroom with a mask and the desk shield in place. He said he thinks kids need to be back in school to learn.

Community Member

1:40:44

- A student thought the points being made were good ones, and agreed that he would not say that the hybrid process has been easy. However, he said, he understood and appreciated that the processes put in place were intended to keep students safe.
- He stated that “risk” was the wrong word to use in relation to the potential of catching COVID given the death toll and the understanding that some students have immunocompromised family members.

1:43:11

Board Members reminded meeting attendees that the public comment period was a time for community members to address the Board, and that personal discussions between audience members should be done in other venues.

Vote on Educational Programs

1:43:40

Mr. Stein introduced the Proposed Amended Reopening Plan as amended during the meeting. It passed with an 8-0 vote.

A Board Member said that the process of returning secondary school students to full-time, in-person instruction is an emotional issue. However, the Board and District have to follow the law regarding when students have to quarantine and consider the physical reality of the space available in buildings. This logic is not being negative; it is being realistic about elements that are beyond the District's control. There also are questions about whether the District can be considered to be back to full-time, in-person instruction if it constantly has to close buildings or has hundreds of students at home in quarantine. The Members also thanked teachers, personnel and custodians who have helped the District have as many in-person instruction days as it has had this year. Bringing all students back will mean more students will be in quarantine, that is not a risk, it is what will happen.

Another Board Member added that a nearby district has tried several different instructional styles and the outcome of returning all students has meant that currently there are 131 students and nine staff members in quarantine. He added that the District administration and staff have been doing great work.

Vote to Amend the Health and Safety Plan

1:50:19

Mrs. Hamlin introduced the Proposed Amended Health and Safety Plan, which passed with an 8-0 vote.

Closing and Adjournment

1:50:55

Following the comments, Board Members voted to adjourn the meeting.