

I'm sure that there are many questions around the district's plan for returning to school in August, especially if you've been reading the CDC guidelines, reviewing the Governor's plan for reopening the state, and following the many news stories on the pandemic. As one might expect, how we plan to reopen the schools depends greatly on what is required and recommended from the state and federal governments as well as how much progress is made in controlling COVID-19.

Broadly I see three potential options. The first is a return to complete normalcy for both students and staff with full buses, classrooms, sports, after school activities, and even hot school lunches. The second is that students return to school under social distancing guidelines, which would mean some alternating schedule for both busing and school attendance. The third is that we are not allowed to have students return to the physical building and all education remains "remote".

As much as we would all like to return to a normal school year as soon as possible, I don't see this option as the most probable to occur at the beginning of the school year (although it may happen later in the year). Given the direction the state is headed in terms of opening up, and the ongoing changes to suggestions on how to open schools across the country under social distancing guidelines, this seems to be the most discussed option and, arguably, the most difficult to implement. The third option is a continuation of what's been happening for the last three months and although easier to maintain, it is very difficult to do well and is hard on students, families, and our staff members. So, as the second option is the most difficult to plan for, may be the only option that is open to us, and requires difficult decisions by everyone involved, that is the plan we're spending the most time trying to develop.

We are told that sometime in mid to late June there will be some guidance coming from the state regarding the opening of school and that we shouldn't make any concrete plans prior to this. Knowing the need for planning childcare for families, the need for staff to determine how to best meet the educational needs of students when they may only be in school for half or less of the normal time, and the district's need to prepare vendors and others to a change in the school schedule, waiting until July to begin planning seems to be a shortsighted choice.

You can imagine the multiple decisions that need to be made to bring students back under social distancing, especially when the recommendations change on a regular basis. Some of these seem basic but each has multiple impacts on how to operate such as how do we bring a portion of the students in while still maintaining educational services to others, are there some students who should be face to face more often, do we bring in students on alternate days, alternate weeks, or some other schedule, how do we transport students, and do we provide alternatives for those families and staff who may have medical issues that compromise their ability to be exposed to many people in an enclosed environment. Multiply that by all of the operational questions and you can see that this is not an easy plan to develop. Add to that the desire by the district to gather some input from families and staff, as well as the uncertainty over state aid and educational costs, and you begin to reach a point where very little fits together easily or smoothly.

Despite all of that, I anticipate having at least some ideas to share with the broader community well before the state provides its recommendations. I can only hope that our plans won't have to be modified extensively to meet those recommendations.