Return to School Buildings and Return to Work Questions
February 3, 2021

1. **Question:** How many more Tier I teachers would be added back to in-person learning for 4th and 5th grade teachers? (Wilk)

   **Answer:** There are 19 Tier I 4th and 5th grade teachers who will be expected to return in-person.

2. **Question:** Can I please get an update on HB 1904 and how it impacts training now and in the future? (Jackson)

   **Answer:** Virginia House Bill 1904 was passed on January 21, 2021 by the Virginia House of Delegates, and Division Lobbyist Jim Council predicts legislative enactment along party lines. The House Bill outlines the following expectations for all Virginia school divisions and employees:

   - Teacher, principal, and division superintendent evaluations to include an evaluation of cultural competency;
   - Every person seeking initial licensure or renewal of a license from the State Board of Education to complete instruction or training in cultural competency;
   - Those with an endorsement in history and social sciences to complete instruction in African American history, as prescribed by the State Board; and
   - Requires each local school board to adopt and implement policies that require each teacher and any other school board employee holding a license issued by the State Board to complete cultural competency training, in accordance with guidance issued by the State Board, at least every two years.

   PWCS, through the Department of Student and Professional Learning has initiated and implemented the expectations of cultural competency, culturally responsive instruction, and curricular work related to African American history, as outlined in Virginia House Bill 1904. PWCS will continue to access and address any added training needs as they arise and in the context of Pandemic-related challenges.

3. **Question:** Can we please redo slide 8 and explain how what assessment we are using to assess how we are meeting these goals? I know PWCS is working very hard to mitigate but there is always room for improvement and reflection. (Jackson)

   **Answer:** The slide will not be part of future presentations, as it depicts only four of the seven categories of mitigation. Two were added by the State only recently, and assessment of contact tracing poses significant challenges. Consequently, the methodology for evaluating and depicting the success of mitigation efforts is evolving as will be reflected in future presentations to the School Board.

4. **Question:** What should teachers do if desks are not currently six feet apart from each other? (Jackson)

   **Answer:** As shown in item nine under the School Facilities tab of the Return to In-Person Learning FAQs, most desks will be a minimum of three feet apart, not six. This is permissible by VDOE and VDH, due to the other mitigation measures in use, such as required masks and desk shields. Teachers who are concerned about spacing should contact their school administrator or, if they are more
comfortable, report their concerns via healthandsafety@pwcs.edu or the telephone hotline. Concerns will be investigated, but it is important to understand that six-foot spacing is not required.

5. **Question:** Thank you for answering my question regarding - “As of January 25, a total of 26 emails have been received via healthandsafety@pwcs.edu and addressed. These communications covered a variety of issues about mitigation strategies in schools.” On my previous questions I asked about the number of calls to the tip line and this was not answered. I know previously we were not collecting data on calls, was this policy revisited? If so how many phone calls regarding safety, pandemic, or mitigation concerns has the tip line received? (Jackson)

**Answer:** Calls are now recorded in a database. However, hotline calls focused on pandemic health/PPE concerns are rare, numbering only four between mid-December and February 1. Content and follow-up are summarized below:
- Parent concern that PWCS was not reporting COVID “outbreaks.” Staff responded by phone to explain the terminology. Parent was appreciative.
- Concern about physical distancing in class, but no school mentioned.
- Concern regarding high school classroom where teachers reportedly socializing. The principal determined that teachers were assisting one another in the room with appropriate physical distancing.
- Concern that a teacher/security resident was not physical distancing after a family member tested positive. Review determined the reporting individual had incorrect information.

6. **Question:** I am concerned about the phase in for students and the impact on K-8 schools, Traditional Schools. They current proposed phase in 4th, 5th, and 6th grade return in the same week. Then the next week 7th and 8th grade will return. This will be a very large number of new students with different needs returning to the building. Can we please revisit the proposed schedule for traditional schools? Can we stagger these schools differently to meet the unique needs of their communities? We need to allow for teachers, administrators, and support staff to have a slowed methodical approach in the Traditional Schools to best meet the varying needs of students returning during this pandemic. (Jackson)

**Answer:** This added flexibility is operationally feasible if the School Board wishes to direct it. It would likely be welcomed by the affected schools (indeed, most middle schools as well as others would also welcome a slower phased return). However, making such changes at this late date comes with downsides: First, unlike a delay due to health concerns, this would likely be viewed as driven by individual school needs rather than those of the students. Second, it would throw another curve to parents who have long called for a level of certainty that permits them to plan in advance. Finally, it would introduce yet another question of equity among teachers. It is therefore reasonable to ask if the benefits would outweigh the “costs.”

7. **Question:** As we introduce more students and staff the buildings infections of COVID-19 will increase. Currently it takes a while to contract trace each incident. Is the nurse in each building responsible for determining each close contact with the assistance of the Health Division? Who else in the building assists the nurse? How long does it take to research this? How will we support staff as the number of students increase with contract tracing in addition to typical duty responsibilities? (Jackson)

**Answer:** The nurse in each building works to assist with case investigations to support the Health District in the contact tracing process. They follow all VDH guidance: [Case investigation and Contact Tracing for K-12 Schools](#). The nurses are supported by our Pandemic Coordinators and staff at the Health District as needed. The school administration also supports the nurse as appropriate in this process and in making appropriate contacts. The time involved varies from situation to situation based
on circumstances and the number of close contacts involved. In order to support staff, the team in the Office of Student Services has formed a group of nurses on special assignment and a team who are on call to assist with after-hour events or as needed.

8. **Question:** Please forward all new pals testing data. Also, I requested math data. I am not sure if that has been sent to the board already. But if so forgive me for not seeing it. Please resend or send all the math testing data for our students.
   (Lateef)

   **Answer:** All elementary school principals have been working to measure and monitor the instructional progress of their students during this school year. Even when dealing with unprecedented concerns surrounding the pandemic, school leaders continue to work with their teachers to ensure all students are growing and making progress in literacy and mathematics. Currently, school leaders are gathering literacy data for all students K-5 by implementing running records and DRA assessments that show growth in the areas of phonemic awareness, reading fluency, and comprehension. Although these assessments are not standardized in a formal assessment environment, all teachers have received extensive training in implementing these types of literacy assessments. Generally, these assessments are given three times per year. As a School Division for the 2020-21 school year, this data showed that approximately 54% of K-2 and 63% of 3-5 students were reading on grade level with an overall average of 60% of students in grades K-5 reading on grade level during the fall. The data for January currently shows that approximately 65% of K-2 and 72% of 3-5 students are reading on grade level with an overall average of 68% of students now reading on grade level. This is an 8% growth from the start of the year.

Regarding PALS data, mid-year assessments are not mandatory. Schools may however choose to progress monitor their students who are receiving interventions based on fall PALS results. PALS data is used to assist school leaders in generating additional data profiles of students' literacy development in grades K-3 and is not a sole indicator of literacy proficiency. Schools that have chosen to implement a mid-year PALS assessment will be completing this by February 16. Schools continue to implement a variety of interventions and strong classroom instruction to assist in raising students’ progress with their phonemic awareness and will utilize the end of year spring PALS assessment to adequately measure progress made in this area for the 2020-21 school year.

Once again, it is important to know that this year's fall assessment administration timeline was unique given that all students in grades K-3 were given the assessment during the challenges of an international pandemic. The assessment was administered at the start of the school year with a State mandated end date of October 16. Due to the pandemic, students were not given in-person instruction with traditional schedules causing a lack of instructional preparation for this assessment. In addition, the PALS assessment was given online which was new for both teachers and students which also caused challenges with the implementation.

Teachers in grades 3-5 have been diligently working to assess students’ mastery of the math standards as well. Unit assessments that directly align to the Virginia Math Standards have been implemented since the start of the year to measure our students' progress in this area. Approximately four units of study have been implemented thus far in math and schools are in the process of reporting their pass rates on these units. This data is being carefully examined at the Division level and is transparently shared amongst principals to discuss best practices and opportunities for refinement.
Even during this pandemic, our school leaders continue to have a strong focus on results and are working to meet every student where they are academically and support them with their personal growth.

While this response was developed collaboratively by all three Elementary Level Associate Superintendents, Mr. Provencio is the point of contact for this information.

9. **Question:** At the last Board meeting, Dr. Walts cited statistics on COVID-19-related adult mental health issues [90% of adults experience COVID-19 related worry, frustration, boredom, or anxiety. 56% of adults experience at least one negative effect on mental health and 49% have shown signs of depression]. What information do we know about students, from studies or our mental health partners? (Wall)

**Answer:** Most of the research addressing COVID-19 impacts in mental health focuses on adults, and there is no local statistical information on students. However, the broader student-related statistics that are available appear to validate efforts PWCS has in place to support students and families. The additional research information includes:

- According to a study published by the CDC, the proportion of mental health-related emergency department visits in the United States for children increased by 24% for those aged 5-11 and 31% for those aged 12-17 beginning in April 2020 as compared to 2019.
  - See Mental Health–Related Emergency Department Visits Among Children Aged 18 Years During the COVID-19 Pandemic — United States, January 1–October 17, 2020 | MMWR (cdc.gov) [https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/69/wr/mm6945a3.htm?s_cid=mm6945a3_w](https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/69/wr/mm6945a3.htm?s_cid=mm6945a3_w)

- According to a study in JAMA Pediatrics, schools play a critical role in providing mental health services. Schools provide “mental health services to 57 percent of adolescents who need care.”

- Hanover Research conducted a national study in fall 2020 of school operations (survey of teachers and parents). The survey addressed perceptions of student health (physical and emotional). The chart below shows the proportions of teachers and parents from their study perceiving student emotional and physical health as good or excellent in three different environments (in-person, hybrid, or fully online).
• The National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) has a COVID-19 Resource Center on its web page. One resource is a document on school reentry that focuses on many areas, including mental health and supports. This document is attached.

• Hanover Research has produced a brief focused on mitigating the impact of social isolation from COVID-19 (this brief is also attached). It addresses long-term mental and physical health concerns. It also lays out guidance for how to support students during and after closures. Many of the practices recommended are those that have already been put in place by the Office of Student Services and school mental health staff.

10. **Question:** Have we considered offering a screening questionnaire to all students or have we done that recently? Privately ask them to fill out a questionnaire. (Wall)

   **Answer:** As School Board members know, PWCS conducted a survey of parents early in the year. Information was shared with school counselors, as appropriate, as a starting point for providing students support or referring parents to appropriate resources. PWCS/School support to those identified students is ongoing. Assessment efforts are also ongoing. Counselors are participating in classroom lessons to let them observe students and then work with their school teams to identify those students who may require additional supports. Schools have a process to continually review needs and assign appropriate interventions. Additionally, the Superintendent’s Pandemic Updates at School Board meetings frequently remind students and their parents/guardians of the supports that are available.

   It is important to note that a student survey about their mental health must, under PWCS regulations, be reviewed by parents/guardians in advance. Thus, it would not be anonymous. The methods currently in use by PWCS are effective in supporting student needs and are consistent with the recommendations of the National Association of School Psychologists (see attached document.)