1. **Question:** How are students doing and what we will do if they get behind in school? How we will catch the students who are falling behind in elementary, middle and high school? Will information in Dr. Cassata’s report be disaggregated to reflect different subgroups? (Zargarpur)

**Answer:** The School Board was provided an update on first-quarter grades on December 4. That information was provided to principals at the December Level meetings. Principal meetings in January will feature ongoing conversations about grading and other performance data. These conversations include an explicit focus on our standards-based grading approach and the consideration of multiple measures of student performance. At the principal meetings, there is a focus on subject and grade-level trends across schools, as well as patterns within individual schools.

In addition, school administrators all have access to On-Track reports in our Data Analytics and Reporting Tool (DART). These reports are updated quarterly and identify students with risk factors that include failing courses, discipline issues, and attendance issues. These reports allow for sorting and grouping by risk factor. At the high school level, students are grouped by counselor to allow for targeted intervention. These reports include demographic data for further analysis.

In February, the Board will be provided with a report on student performance in the first two quarters as well as interventions in place to address gaps.

School teams and parents may utilize our Intervention Team process to develop targeted plans to support students as needed. The Intervention Team process is a general education process that brings together key individuals on the school team to brainstorm ways to support our general education students.

2. **Question:** Some parents expressed concern about outreach to struggling students. I know we have covered this in meetings, and I realize some high schools are offering office hours and opportunities for students. How are we identifying students who are falling further behind and what are schools doing to draw them back in? (Zargarpur)

**Answer:** As noted in question 1, our school counselors work closely with teachers to identify struggling students. In addition, counselors and administrators identify struggling students using tools such as the On-Track Reports in DART. In the virtual environment, counselors continue to run group and individual counseling to support students. Approaches to supporting students who are falling behind vary by level and by school, though teachers at all levels work collaboratively to address problems. Comments from two elementary principals provide examples:

- “We will continue to provide tiered interventions and supports to meet the needs of our struggling learners, whether in a virtual or in-person format. We are currently providing tiered reading interventions (Orton Gillingham, PALS, Reading Teacher, Additional Reading groups....) to in-person, virtual, and concurrent students.
- If they get behind, we conference with parents, make intervention plans and use our resources to remediate. It is a challenge, but teachers never quit.”
3. **Question:** (How are we dealing with the post-travel return to school buildings? In the Coles Town Hall meeting) several people expressed concern about coming back from the holidays and seeing a surge in COVID cases. I referred them to the Scoop on how PWCS makes COVID decisions and I told them I’d relay their concern about the surge to you. One staff member reported that she feels safe in her classroom (which is always good to hear). (Zargarpur)

**Answer:** Currently, Virginia has no travel restrictions in place. PWCS staff continue to monitor the Virginia Department of Health website for any changes in this guidance. During our School Health Response Team meetings we have reviewed the current guidance from Virginia Department of Health (VDH) and as a Division, we continue to work to create a culture of acceptable absenteeism. Our team in Communications has worked to provide the school community with access to the current CDC and VDH guidance by including the information in “The Scoop!” and by placing it prominently on our website.

As we did after the November holiday break, we will continue to monitor both staff and student illness and positive cases and quarantine. As part of our efforts to effectively monitor the COVID-19 situation in our schools, we have worked to enhance our data collection processes. The team in the Office of Student Services has worked to align the data collection process with the Office of Human Resources and we are now able to monitor quarantine in addition to positive student and staff cases. This data will provide us with a comprehensive picture of the impact of COVID-19 spread after the holiday travel season. It is important to remember that quarantine does not equate to illness and that a majority of staff and students reflected in the numbers are quarantined due to exposure outside of the school/workplace setting.

4. **Question:** Please shed light on the following issues passed along by staff--consolidating items from two emails: (Jessie)

- Specialists are complaining that they are being asked to cover classes when teachers do not report, some without n-95 masks. Some are now bathroom escorts.
- Counselors are being ask to assume other roles, to include cafeteria hostesses and even Asst. Principal. They and others are being required to fill in when subs are not available
- Counseling is being interrupted for students because they are being called to assume other ancillary duties
- Kindergarten teachers need aides
- Principals are asking teachers to come in off sick leave
- Tier 1 employees are being required to return to work
- Tier 2 employees are being requested to return to work
- Counselors and other specialists are being asked to cover student lunches…some without N-95 masks
- Teachers and others are being discouraged from taking sick leave at all
- Counselors and other specialists are being used to teach concurrently without training
- Teachers are working 12-14 hour days in order to make this work. They are saying that they are “tired” Teachers and staff concerned about being quarantine during the holidays and not being able to interact with their families
- The big question: Do we have the staffing to support the Hybrid Model without jeopardizing the safety of others
- Teacher are offended that some are giving orders from their “Zoom Room.”
- Teachers are offended that we brag about how well we are doing without regard for their safety and at their expense
They cannot wrap their head around the fact that other school divisions are looking at the high positivity rate (PWCS the highest in northern Va.) and it is ignored.

**Answer:** With respect to PPE provision and availability, please see the recent special edition of “The Scoop!” as well as the information provided on the PWCS-produced video located at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cULzO6DpDN4&feature=youtu.be. Additionally, the issue was discussed extensively at Board meetings to confirm that staff can get prompt assistance if they consider PPE on hand at a school to be inadequate. All staff members have access to a KN95 mask that offers a high level of protection. Note: KN95 masks have similar filter performance (>95%) as an N95 mask, but are manufactured outside of the USA.

Teacher assistants (TAs) are currently funded at one per 24 students in a class. Principals have the flexibility to populate classrooms to make the most of this allocation, while also tapping into other school funds to augment TA numbers to meet the needs of their kindergarten students/classrooms, as needed. This is reflected in the comments of one principal:

> “We have five sections of Kindergarten and three TAs. Currently, the three assistants work with all five classes to support both live and in-person instruction as we have no all-virtual classes. The kindergarten teachers made a schedule for the TAs to rotate equally among the five classes to support small group instruction both live and in-person instruction, encore, recess, and lunch. I also have my Media Asst. supporting when she is available to support a teacher who doesn't have an assistant at that time.”

Regarding Counselors: During these unprecedented times, many staff members are relied on to support students in ways they have not before. We recognize the valuable role our school counselors serve in supporting our students’ mental health and well-being. School counselors are part of the school team and contribute to a safe and effective learning environment and just as in previous years are asked to assist with operations in our school buildings. All school counselors expect to do their “fair share” of tasks to support the overall safety and well-being of students. When the tasks assigned to a counselor fall outside this “fair share” area, they are encouraged to speak directly to their principal to problem-solve. If a school counselor does not feel comfortable talking directly to the building principal, he/she can reach out to either Dr. Deborah Ransom, supervisor of Elementary Counseling and Related Services, or Dr. Richmond Hill, supervisor of Secondary Counseling and Student Support Services. Dr.’s Hill and Ransom are prepared to work in partnership with school leaders to problem-solve such issues.

Communications directly to the Board, messages to teachers and staff, and responses to constituent questions (on which Board members have been copied) have provided extensive detail on accommodations for Tier 1 employees and the interactive process involved. Complete explanations can be also found via the HR newsletter at https://www.smore.com/tga26 or the November 4, 2020 RTS Q & A. Interactive meetings have continued since the publication of the November 4 document, with PWCS adhering to the process noted. The FAQs included in the information in the newsletter directly addresses the “Tier 2” issue, stating:

> “PWCS is not required [by the Americans with Disabilities Act] to engage in the interactive process or implement reasonable accommodations for employees whose medical concerns are for someone other than themselves. However, administrators will work with you regarding additional mitigation measures, including personal protective equipment (PPE) and implementation of workplace protocols that meet federal, state, and local criteria for safety during this pandemic.”
We are confident that principals are adhering to PWCS Sick Leave Policy. Any individuals raising concerns about their treatment under that policy should be referred directly to HR.

PWCS continues to work to ensure that staffing is adequate and optimized to safely and effectively deliver on the 50/50 hybrid model according to our recommended timetable.

Finally, we have made every effort to clarify the PWCS COVID-19 safety-related decision-making process through the regular presentations at School Board meetings and most recently through the special edition of “The Scoop!”. The information provided illustrates that neither high positivity rates nor other factors are ever ignored.

5. **Question:** Please provide a summary of findings. For example we had 157 staff members last reported. How many do we have now? We had 214 students, how many do we have now? *Again, you have chosen to overwhelm me with charts and data that we have to translate.* (Jessie)

**Answer:** As of December 30 at 12:00 p.m. we were able to report the following: For the period of 12/15-12/30 we have 109 students and 40 staff members who have been quarantined because they were in close contact of someone with COVID-19. Of those, only 37 students and 10 staff members were quarantined because of a close contact that occurred in a PWCS building or a PWCS vehicle. Please refer to the December 30 Board COVID-19 Situation Update. Your weekly update includes a new data chart that should provide a clearer picture of both student and staff data. The chart provides information on the reason for the surveillance submissions, this includes illness and quarantine. Our goal is to be transparent and to provide as much information as possible on the COVID-19 situation. In support of that goal, this information will be provided to the School Board weekly from this point forward as part of the Tuesday Situational Updates.

6. **Question:** I asked for a Mitigation Audit a month ago. Since mitigation is your rationale for remaining open I am asking for a follow up immediately. I have received concerns about mitigation practices from teachers. My request for a mitigation review was supported by Mr. Wilks. (Jessie)

**Answer:** The requested “Mitigation Audit” is being incorporated into the broader approach of a “PPE Review” described in the December 11, 2020 Board communication. As noted, inspections/observations were underway in December, including a review of implementation and assessment of supplies related to four key mitigation strategies outlined in the Core Indicators for the CDC Dynamic School Decision-Making Indicators:

- consistent and correct use of masks
- social distancing to the extent possible
- proper hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette
- proper cleaning and disinfecting

Findings concerning compliance with COVID-19 related guidance will first be provided in the Superintendent’s Pandemic Update at the January 6 Board meeting and subsequent updates will be forthcoming as monthly “Information Items.”

7. **Question:** I am hearing about quarantines in schools which will result in our staff being in quarantine during the holiday period some will not be able to have Christmas with their families. How many quarantines have taken place? You indicated you do not have these reports. Who does? (Jessie)
**Answer:** Please see the answer to number 5 or refer to the December 30 COVID-19 Situation Update.

8. **Question:** Teacher and parents are filling my e-mail account “begging” us to wait until after the holidays. They see other systems going virtual. Our positivity rate is up to 15%, we are the highest positivity rate in northern Va. We are a “hot spot.” Young people are the largest number of carriers, 22193 and 22191 are hot spots. 157 staff members is too many for us to look the other way. Again, how many quarantine students and teachers to we have? (Jessie)

**Answer:** Please see the answer to question 5. In addition, an update provided to the Board on December 22 included the information from the Pandemic Team’s collaboration with the Prince William Health District that explains several of the COVID-19 indicators other than the positivity rate that was fluctuating and continues to be considered as we move forward with our plans. It is also important to consider the mitigations that have been put into place.

9. **Question:** How often do you (Mr. Imon) and Dr. Walts, meet with Mrs. Huebner and Mrs. Polk? What are their recommendations? What does the Health Department report mean to you? Please provide a response (Jessie)

**Answer:** All members of the Pandemic Team collaborate on PWCS COVID-19 discussions and consideration of Division strategies and information. As Pandemic Team Leader, Ms. Huebner is the conduit for information from the team and for recommendations stemming from meetings with the Prince William Health District. To maximize efficiency, information is routinely shared at regularly scheduled meetings with the Deputy and Associate Superintendents. Urgent information is conveyed to the Deputy whenever necessary and passed on to Dr. Walts as needed. COVID-19 actions and updates are discussed at every Superintendent’s Staff meeting. Dr. Walts also initiates conversations on health and safety directly with the Deputy and Chair of the Pandemic team, as well as in conversations with Associate Superintendent of Finance and Risk Management John Wallingford and Director of Risk Management and Security Services Ron Crowe regarding PPE.

10. **Question:** I think this is a mistake. We appear to be very insensitive to our staff. Staff members are really afraid. We can error on the side of caution. Don’t worry about them quitting. Teachers cannot afford to quit. There are no substitutes. We need to pamper our staff. We are better than this. We are appearing as elitists. What would happen if we go virtual for the remaining few days until the first of the year at least. We are better than this. (Jessie)

**Answer:** The issue of possibly delaying until the first of the year is now moot; however, the questions of staff perception and fears are not. It is important to note that staff are moving forward with the Return to School Building and Work Plans and Timetables as directed and supported by the School Board following numerous updates on student, school, and staff information and COVID-19 metrics in conjunction with PWCS mitigation efforts. Our staff share anxiety and perceptions of helplessness being experienced by individuals and families nationwide, especially those who are or include essential workers. Many also cannot afford to quit. Instead, we anticipate that their dedication and use of our mitigation efforts will lead them to set aside their anxieties and pull together as part of teams that make the best of a difficult situation that must balance often-competing objectives and concerns. We are doing our best to balance valid employee COVID-19 related concerns with the equally important and valid concerns raised by students and their families about the virtual school experience.

11. **Question:** I am asking you and others to stop bragging about how great we are. I am hearing from staff that they are working 12-15 hours a day. They find it offensive that we brag but we are still reporting
from the comfort of our zoom rooms while they are working in fear more than 10 hours a day. They have reported that they were offended when principals report how great things are when they are being over worked and asked to work in what can be a toxic environment. (Jessie)

**Answer:** The information being provided at Board meetings by our well-respected principals (representing the frontlines of implementation) and via other channels is responsive to requests for information about how PWCS is serving the educational, emotional, and related needs of our students. Similar information has been provided about supports for teachers and staff and additional efforts to address their concerns. This is not “bragging” instead, it is being accountable for what is expected of PWCS by the School Board and other stakeholders. While there has been plenty of discussion about the need for improvement in specific areas, the success stories serve as important examples of what is being achieved in some schools that can serve as models for others. It is important to note that the Return to School Building and Work Plans and timetables were developed with the understanding of the advantages of some in-person education over only a fully virtual model for meeting some students’ needs. In-person work expectations were established to directly support the Plan and critical Division operations. Employees at all levels are being asked to do more in response to an unprecedented situation. Again, the Division is working hard to address teacher and staff concerns. However, it could be said that many parents and community members voice and promote actions that might well prompt greater staff unhappiness. As Board members are well aware, no course of action, regardless of how well-thought-out or intentioned, will satisfy everyone. We shouldn’t and do not assume that the loudest objections and reports of “being offended” always demand specific responses. Instead, PWCS will continue to address legitimate concerns while endeavoring to make all employees and other stakeholders feel heard and appreciated.

12. **Question:** What is the system to handle students who do not respond to the virtual model (substantial decline in grades) (Jessie)

**Answer:** See response to questions 1 and 2.

13. **Question:** Are there plans to respond to the projected increase in the virus following the Christmas holidays? Will we continue to return additional students for in-person learning inspire of the projections or will we take a wait and see posture? (Jessie)

**Answer:** PWCS continues to provide extensive PPE mitigations and is moving toward the execution of the 50/50 hybrid model as currently scheduled in the absence of new data and interpretations from the Prince William Health District, VDH, and CDC to indicate a need to do otherwise. While increased COVID numbers are projected county-wide in the post-holiday period, this does not necessarily suggest a similar increase in school-based spread and/or directly affect other COVID-19 metrics used for decision-making. It is important to note that we did not see a surge in our schools following the Thanksgiving holiday. Consistent with communications to the public, employees, and the School Board, always know that we will continue to monitor the situation closely and changes to operations including a delay for the further return of students or other mitigations could occur. Please see the answer to question 3 for additional information.

14. **Question:** How many complaints have been received by the ombudsman regarding our Return to Learn Plan? (Jessie)

**Answer:** To date, during the first half of Fiscal Year 2021, the Office of the Ombudsman has assisted 82 visitors. The majority of visitors being PWCS employees. Of the 82 visitors assisted, 41 employees
(out of a total employee base of more than 12,000) expressed concerns about the Division's Return to Learn Plan. Issues raised included:

- concerns about the safety and advisability of returning to in-person learning;
- employees expressing concern for student safety, staff safety, and the efficacy of concurrent learning;
- Tier 1 employees concerned about how the Division engages in the ADA interactive process, lack of virtual assignments (when staff and administrators disagree about whether a job could be performed virtually), and perceived inequities between teachers and school-based staff provided virtual assignments as an accommodation and those who are not. These employees are often distraught, perceive the Division is not prioritizing student and staff safety, and seek assistance to evaluate the options available to them.

15. **Question:** During the last meeting I kindly requested that other information be included on our COVID 19 page. This included the following: (Wilk)

- Current number of active subs available
- Technology distribution status
- Bandwidth capability
- Audit of PPE

I was curious if there was an update regarding any of the above? Last I check, none of the above was included on our distinct COVID page.

**Answer:** Information on the bandwidth upgrade and technology distribution is prominently featured as the first two items in the technology section of the Return to In-Person Learning FAQs of the COVID-19 web pages. The number of active subs (1,232 currently able to accept assignments plus 363 awaiting completion of Return to Work safety training) is not currently posted. And, as noted in the last Board Q&As, the PPE audit is underway as part of a broader compliance review. This information can be posted once presented to the School Board as part of the January 6 Pandemic Update. However, staff should consider how the information should be presented to make it relevant and understandable to web users while not crowding-out more vital information on the COVID-19 landing page. For example, it is uncertain that noting the immediate availability of 1,232 active subs would be meaningful to anyone beyond administrators and HR staff. Please see the answer to question 6 for further information.

16. **Question:** Also, a great recommendation came during my town hall regarding HVAC systems. I spoke to Al earlier this year, but was wondering if we could post when each building last had their system inspected for COVID compliance? (Wilk)

**Answer:** Our school HVAC systems were physically inspected for COVID-19 compliance between June and early September 2020. The HVAC systems are continually monitored through multiple channels (i.e., computer building automation system, work orders, and preventative maintenance). We will update the FAQs website accordingly.

17. **Question:** Can you please provide an update on our attendance numbers for the month of November. Do we continue to lose students, and what does it look like by grade and school? How is the fall in attendance affecting the operating budgets of our schools, and what are our procedures for assisting schools who are facing budgetary issues? (Wall)
Answer: COVID-19 has likely contributed to student enrollment being 2,972 (3.23%) below the projected enrollment for September 30, 2020. Student enrollment continued to decrease an additional 296 students, as of November 30, 2020. Since September 30, 2019, the breakdown is:

- Elementary change: -2,032 (-5.0%)
- Middle school change: -380 (-1.8%)
- High school change: +285 (+1.0%)

Budgets are now in the works. Enrollment loss will be somewhat mitigated by “no loss funding” provided by the Governor’s introduced budget. The Division is still waiting on guidance regarding both Federal revenue and state “no loss funding.”

18. **Question:** Question: High School students have an extraordinary amount of pressure on them during this pandemic and many are worried about their future and the workload. (Jackson)

- Could we please continue to address the workload?
- Could we please explain to High School Students the current status of SOL tests?
- There is a lot of misinformation or lack of information regarding these tests and they are linked to the diploma.
- Can we consider an informational session for High School Students, much like the session for parents, covering applying to college during a Pandemic?

**Answer:** The Division has continued to work to address the workload concern for high school students. The concern has been addressed in Level Meetings with principals as well as in Division and school communications to staff. For example, all teachers and staff were reminded not to assign work and projects to students over the winter break. Principals and school administrators have continued to work with staff proactively as well as address specific parent and student concerns.

Federal testing requirements have not been changed for the 2020-21 school year. SOL tests will continue to take place as part of the process of earning verified credits towards graduation. However, VDOE has continued to update emergency guidelines for school Divisions such as the latest updates to the *Emergency Guidelines for Locally-Awarded Verified Credits* which were included in the December 4, 2020, State Superintendent’s Memo #316-20. The Division will work to put out additional communication to parents and students to ensure they understand the status of SOL testing.

19. There are reports from the public that schools are closing due to COVID-19 in our county. Can we please get an update on this and/or can we address this publicly during the meeting Wednesday? (Jackson)

**Answer:** As of January 3, 2021, there have been no school closures in PWC due to COVID-19.

20. **Question:** Can we please provide an update to the public on any news the Superintendent and staff have received on vaccines, specifically for staff? (Jackson)

**Answer:** Virginia has not yet finalized its vaccine allocation plans, but the Virginia Health Department (VDH) guidance now under consideration would align with the CDC recommendations in prioritizing teachers, support staff, and daycare workers as “Frontline Essential Workers” who would get the vaccine in Phase 1b. According to VDH, “The first vaccines arrived in Virginia in December 2020 and are currently being administered to healthcare workers and residents of long-term care facilities [Phase1a]. These vaccines come in several smaller shipments, and there is currently limited supply. Additional
doses are expected in early 2021 and will be provided to more Virginians, but the exact timeline is not yet known.” The CDC’s Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices has recommended that the next priority group (Phase 1b) include frontline essential workers and people 75 and older; followed by (Phase 1c) people aged 16-74 with high-risk medical conditions, people aged 65-74, and other essential workers.

21. **Question:** If the metrics remain high and we remain in Phase II how will ‘that’ impact the role in of Middle and High School Students?  (Jackson)

   **Answer:** The Health Leadership Team, in collaboration with the Prince William Health District, continues to monitor the metrics and work to ensure that our mitigation strategies minimize the risk in our buildings. As part of our decision-making process, we look at the suggested strategies by the CDC and recognize that these become even more important in a time of high activity in the community. A change in the effectiveness of the five key mitigation strategies that are part of the Core Indicators or a change in the secondary indicators will be considered at all levels as we move toward the return of additional students for in-person learning. This includes our secondary students. As a team, we will need to look at our ability to cohort students and the ability to social distance based on the updated numbers of students who intend to take advantage of in-person learning. As per consistent and ongoing communications to the public, employees, and the School Board, PWCS will continue to monitor the situation closely and notes that changes to operations, including a delay in the further return of students, or changes to mitigation measures, could occur.

22. **Question:** Teachers are very concerned about air circulation. Can we please address their concerns in explaining what steps the county has taken (I know this was addressed to some degree) to address this concern? There are many concerns regarding the safety of teachers and students regarding the virus being “circulated” for example whether or not they/students can safely remove their masks to eat. (Jackson)

   **Answer:** Information about ventilation is posted in the School Facilities Section of the FAQs and is routinely shared in detail with teachers and others raising questions about air circulation issues. See response to question 16, above. Additionally, HVAC technicians from the Office of Facilities Services meticulously checked the operations of all of the ventilation systems in our buildings to ensure systems are operating as designed. PWCS increases air ventilation and exchange with outdoor air (above Code requirements) while maintaining comfortable temperatures and humidity levels for the building’s occupants. There is a critical balance between increased ventilation, outdoor temperatures (freezing weather), and humidity (humid weather) that must be taken into consideration to prevent freezing coils and elevated mold counts (greater than outdoors) in our buildings.

   PWCS also increases the amount of outside air brought into buildings prior to occupancy, and post-occupancy, to flush our facilities. Facilities Services is monitoring systems closely to ensure proper operation and optimal ventilation.

   These measures continue to assure that risks are minimized when students and staff are following COVID-19 safety guidelines, which do permit the removal of masks when eating.

23. **Question:** Can we please get a status on the healthandsafety@pwcs.edu email, how many emails (5 as of 12/17) have they received in total? Any consistent themes?  (Jackson)

   **Answer:** The team has received a total of 12 emails. Due to the low number, no themes are evident at this time.
24. **Question:** When we “re-survey” parents can we include a statement that return to in-person learning is contingent on data to avoid any miscommunication or parents feeling like the “rug was pulled out from under them” if PWCS has to postpone a roll-in due to external variables? (Jackson)

**Answer:** We have consistently communicated that all Return to School Plans and timetables are contingent on changing health metrics and will continue to do so at every opportunity. The message to parents sent on January 4 stated in boldface:

> All future phases of in-person return are not guaranteed, and dates are subject to change, due to health, safety, and operational impacts caused by COVID-19.

25. **Question:** Follow-up to 12/17 questions- please provide an update on technology for 2nd and 3rd graders returning to the building. (Jackson)

**Answer:** The bandwidth capability is fully operational at all schools. All student laptops have been received. As previously noted, appropriate personnel are aware of the need to make certain technology is properly functioning and to assist teachers with inevitable challenges. All students who need access to WiFi at home can receive it free by asking their school.