Return to School Buildings and Return to Work Questions
January 27, 2021

1. **Question:** Our Dashboard data does not detail staff who are on quarantine. As schools start to see increased exposures and additional students are introduced into the buildings there are less staff members to cover classes. To avoid putting additional pressure on already strained resources what is the plan for when a school cannot find a substitute to cover a class? What is the policy on covering classes during this pandemic? Are we relying on other teachers to cover classes? How will determine school closure if substitutes are not located? (Jackson)

**Answer:** As noted in the January 6 Q&As, PWCS had 1,232 active subs available to accept assignments as of that date. PWCS continues to actively hire new substitutes and will be launching another recruitment effort to support our Return to Buildings. In unusual situations, principals can also request that other staff cover a class, as further explained in the aforementioned Q&As. We do not anticipate the need for full school closures, except in response to major school-focused quarantines and/or outbreaks, which would be handled case-by-case by school administrators in consultation with their Associate Superintendent and the pandemic team.

2. **Question:** Can I please get an update on my request for unannounced surprise searches (sent 1/14 and following up 1/15-I am unsure as to when this question will be answered)? (Jackson)

**Answer:** As noted in the PPE Review Report contained in the Friday, January 22 Board communication, evaluation visits conducted between December 14, 2020 and January 16, 2021 were announced in advance. Risk Management is now conducting unannounced visits for ongoing mitigation evaluations. Thus far, the vast majority of onsite audits have found schools to be in compliance with mitigation practices and signage. Where needed, additional support resources and support were provided to address minor issues.

3. **Question:** Can teachers delay in putting their children – can they put them in the middle of the quarter depending on when they return to work? (Jackson)

**Answer:** We have consistently asked that all parents who opt for students to remain with virtual learning commit to that decision for the remainder of the semester to facilitate proper planning for staffing, distancing, and other mitigation measures. This needs to apply to staff members as well since a sudden influx of students mid-semester would likely create additional and unnecessary challenges for teachers and schools. Parents who elect to have students return for hybrid in-person learning retain the option of reverting to fully virtual status due to any new parental concerns arising at a later date by contacting their child’s school.

4. **Question:** Teachers are reporting concerns regarding mitigation or contract tracing compliance during our meetings. We have asked them to report them. Can we please get a status on the healthandsafety@pwcs.edu email, how many emails (5 as of 12/17, 15 as of 1/6/21) have they received in total? Can we please review the data emailed, called in to Anonymous tip line, and the Ombudsman for any consistent themes? Can PWCS provide the Board with that data? (Jackson)

**Answer:** 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.
Policy 180 and the International Ombudsman Association's (IOA) Code of Ethics prevent the Office of the Ombudsman from sharing communications received from visitors. The Office categorizes concerns using the IOA uniform reporting categories. As reported using that system, approximately 35 concerns related to safety have been discussed with the Office of the Ombudsman to date. Where these concerns are specific to mitigation measures and/or contact tracing, one of the options provided to visitors is to report concerns to the safetyandhealth@pwcs.edu email. The Ombudsman works with the Deputy Superintendent, who in-turn collaborates with the Level Associates to resolve any and all concerns.

5. **Question:** Using the CDC recommendations PWCS has placed us in the Moderate-High Risk Category. Some grades can be cohorted and/or are classified as a “vulnerable learner” and these groups are in the subgroups to be prioritized by VDOE. Yes, I am concerned about community spread and the staff and students in the building. If metrics continue to worsen (or spike in February) is it possible that schools will close prior to any announcement from the Governor? How are we assessing the success or difficulties with the integration of 2nd and 3rd grade students? (Jackson)

**Answer:** Directives from the Governor continue to vest individual school divisions with authority for reopening or closing due to COVID-19 conditions. As such, PWCS will continue to follow the updated K-12 guidance from the Virginia Departments of Health and Education in collaboration with the Prince William Health District, making it feasible, though unlikely that our schools could close without a prior announcement from the Governor.

The 2nd-3rd grade integration is proceeding smoothly, with only routine challenges. Of course, PWCS continues to monitor health patterns in all schools and includes associated information in the COVID-19 Dashboard and in ongoing weekly Board communications. Principals are observing concurrent instruction in classrooms. And any staff, student, or parent concerns are being addressed as needed. We continue to monitor student progress using reading assessments including PALS, performance assessments, and “standardized” Math Unit Assessments. We also monitor their social and emotional needs and provide opportunities for students and families to let us know how their students are doing and feeling and work with the Office of Student Services to address student issues, as needed.

6. **Question:** I understand that the mental health of our students along with instructional best practices are imperative. I understand that feeling isolated and being overwhelmed or losing parents to COVID greatly impact our student’s emotional well-being. Could we hear more about additional steps the school system is taking since the last update in another meeting? If this is added to the agenda (as I suggested) please note the meeting it will be discussed, to avoid answering the question twice, thank you. (Jackson)

**Answer:** This matter was addressed directly with Ms. Jackson in a series of emails with Deputy Superintendent Keith Imon. Comments regarding mental health will be in the Superintendent’s Pandemic Update at the January 27 School Board meeting. Additionally, an update on the implementation of the additional academic and mental health supports presented at the January 6 Board meeting will be provided at an upcoming future Board meeting.

7. **Question:** Approximately how many teachers we currently have in-person teaching pre-K thru 3 right now? (Wilk)

**Answer:** 1,603 as of January 27.
8. **Question:** To lessen the impact of returning larger numbers of students and to increase our efforts at mitigation, the suggestion has been made to move our asynchronous day to Wednesdays and to cluster students in cohorts of Monday-Tuesday and Thursday-Friday. Please assess the desirability and feasibility of this proposal at this point in the pandemic. (Knowing that we did not select this option in the fall, but with the progression of the pandemic, switching to such a schedule would hold obvious benefit). (Wall)

**Answer:** Changes would impact childcare arrangements for multiple stakeholders: parents, transportation, teaching, and administrative staff. Predictability and advanced notice for stakeholder planning were deemed more important to the focus groups we met with than the schedule itself. Any changes of this nature would have implications for class schedules at the secondary level that would also cause substantial disruption. Additionally, note that Mondays were originally chosen as the all-virtual days, as they are often the most impacted by holiday schedules. There are a great many schedules that could be chosen, each with advantages and disadvantages. It is our belief that staying with the current schedule would result in less disruption for the greatest number of people.

9. **Question:** What are the division’s plans, short-term and long-term, to address the mental health issues that students are and will continue to face as the pandemic continues? (Wall)

**Answer:** Currently, our school counselors are busy delivering school counseling core curriculum lessons across the Division. In addition to delivering our established school counseling objectives, they are weaving in lessons about stress and trauma. Our work is focused on the tiered system of support to best meet the needs of all students. When school counselors identify a student in need of further support, they work quickly to ascertain what is needed and provide those services in the form of individual or group counseling.

We continue to have weekly offerings of the Youth Mental Health First Aid course for interested staff members. This course trains educators to identify and act when they suspect a student is experiencing a possible mental health problem. These courses will be offered each Monday for the remainder of the calendar year. More sessions will be added as needed.

All certified staff and administrators are currently working to complete the “Supporting our Students” professional development offerings. This bundle provides more opportunities for teachers and other education professionals to learn about working with a student who may be suffering from emotional challenges. All teachers and administrators are now completing an online training titled “At-Risk.” In this training, they interact with a virtual “student” and make choices about how they would proceed when faced with different troublesome behaviors.

Our goal is for this combination of delivering direct services to those students most in need and training staff members to identify early signs of emotional distress, to better equip PWCS to confront the social/emotional challenges that lie ahead. An update on the implementation of the additional academic and mental health supports presented at the January 6 Board meeting will be provided at an upcoming future Board meeting.

10. **Question:** How are we addressing the high level of isolation and lack of student engagement with peers and staff, as seen in our most recent data collected on virtual learning, at the MS/HS level? Do we collect counseling data and other data on the mental health and wellness of students and if so, what is this data showing regarding trends among our students in the area of mental health and wellness? (Wall)
**Answer:** Per information previously shared with the Board, we distributed a social/emotional needs assessment to all parents at the start of the school year. This allowed us to connect those most in need of mental health services. These identified students will continue to be followed throughout the school year. Additionally, the aforementioned training that teachers are currently completing will help them spot possible behavior concerns and in turn refer students to a school-based mental health professional for support. Finally, we continue to promote and get messages on the studentsupportservices@pwcs.edu electronic hotline. Contacts from parents/guardians and students in need of more support allow us to quickly connect them with help.

11. **Question:** How many substitute teachers do we have trained and ready to go to step into our classrooms? Are we making N95 masks available to subs who request it? (Wall)

**Answer:** Please see the response to question #1. Several hundred subs have been fit tested for N95s for use in high-risk classrooms; all subs who need them get them. We also have ear loop face coverings and KN95 masks for subs at schools, as needed.

12. **Question:** When we begin returning secondary students to buildings, will we also allow for the clubs and after school activities to be able to meet in person? Do we have a division-level plan or guidelines for rolling these out (a prioritization list, procedures, guidelines for how to operate, who may operate, etc.), or are we leaving this up to individual schools? (Wall)

**Answer:** Currently, Central Office staff (Supervisor of the Arts Dr. Ed Stephenson and Supervisor of Student Activities Kelly Gardner) are working with high school administrators, directors of student activities, and the certified athletic trainers to address this opportunity. In-person athletics are already underway with common restrictions for out-of-season conditioning. Clubs were started for the year virtually. Clubs are permitted to function using the Phase II mitigation plan provided by the Division. Marching Band is also scheduled to return with Season Two (normally the fall season). Additional clubs and activities are also being planned and efforts to align these opportunities across schools, to ensure equity, are currently in progress. Middle level principals have determined that fall and winter sports will not occur, but spring sports are still being considered, pending the outcome of decisions regarding returning to school buildings.

13. **Question:** For music programs, what are our plans for beginning to allow gatherings of students to play together, especially considering outside gatherings for music programs to be able to practice and play together outside. Do we have procedures in place? (Wall)

**Answer:** The Supervisor of Arts is working with school leaders and teachers of co-curricular activities to provide some outdoor spring events for these groups, prioritizing high school seniors when restrictions/mitigation require limiting the number of students. A number of middle and high schools have also received (or are receiving) covered outdoor classroom spaces (carport structures) to support these activities. These students are also operating under the Phase II guidance provided by the Division with additional mitigation for periods of substantial community transmission.

14. **Question:** Are robotics programs operating at any of our schools? (Wall)

**Answer:** Robotics is a Virginia High School League activity and is coordinated by Kelly Gardner, supervisor of student activities; Denyse Carroll, robotics specialist; and the directors of student activities (at the high schools), and the activities coordinators (at the middle schools). Robotics have been able to continue their work with club sponsors virtually at the middle and high school levels.
15. **Question:** Regarding the data from the most recent study/survey we conducted on January 4th through January 8th, do we collect data on the rationale for why individuals changed their preference? In other words, would we be able to identify why parents switched their preferences? (Wall)

**Answer:** No. The information was collected via the selections made in ParentVUE for scheduling purposes only. However, insights into satisfaction with online learning may be found in the Virtual Learning Survey Results presented at the January 6 Board meeting. The associated PowerPoint deck was provided in a January 6 Board communication.

16. **Question:** Are we giving schools the flexibility to grant as many Tier 1 requests for virtual instruction as their program can allow? As a follow-up, if a school were to devise a plan to accommodate all Tier 1 teachers with a virtual assignment without an undue burden on operations, would they be allowed to implement this plan? Lastly, has consideration been given to set up a team of planners to help schools allow as many Tier 1 teachers to teach with a virtual assignment as possible? (Wall)

**Answer:** Please see the January 19 Board communication for details on efforts to assist Tier 1 staff and the schools they serve with facilitation of virtual assignments. As explained, “The Superintendent’s Staff approved the hiring of additional staff to work as classroom monitors on a temporary basis, allowing temporary virtual assignments for Tier 1 staff serving grades 4-12 until such time that these staff members have the opportunity to be vaccinated and develop immunity to the virus (approximately six weeks from the first shot, which includes the four week Moderna delay for the second dose and the two weeks to maximize effectiveness and five weeks for Pfizer). Vaccination of Tier 1 staff currently working in-person is already in progress, eliminating the need for such flexibility. As reflected by steps described, the Superintendent’s Staff and Human Resources team are already serving as planners to assist schools with this important issue.

17. **Question:** For students whose grades indicate they need additional academic support, are school teams proactively reaching out to all students who have shown a decline in performance across all performance levels? For instance, are we initiating conversations with students whose performance has declined, regardless of whether they were earning mostly As, Bs, or Cs, in addition those who are performing below average or failing one or more classes? (Wall)

**Answer:** Administrators and teachers are working together to identify students whose school performance has declined, or who are struggling with completing assignments. Principals are reviewing student achievement data with their staff to encourage teachers to address student needs. Collaborative Learning Teams are reviewing student achievement data and making adjustments to pacing, assessments, and supports. Teachers are reaching out to affected students and their parents to address academic concerns as well as related attendance issues (with help from attendance officers). Middle school principals are working to catalog the various strategies being employed across all 19 schools so that best practices may be shared.

Additionally, all school counselors and social workers have been reminded to use the “At Risk” report in our DART system to monitor student grades, attendance, and behavior. This report allows them to quickly identify students who show academic concerns, such as low grades, so they can render support.

As you will recall, the Level Associates presented at the January 6 School Board meeting plans to provide additional academic, mental health, and organizational supports on Mondays, after school during the week, and possibly on Saturdays.
18. **Question:** What long-term plans do we have for academic remediation? Are we adjusting curriculum, testing, performance standards? What long-term plans do we have to close the achievement gap that will have likely been exacerbated by our COVID response? (Wall)

**Answer:** Teachers are working with students to provide remediation on an ongoing basis. Teachers are working on extended day/supplemental instruction services, as presented at the January 6 School Board meeting. Additional summer school supports also will be available for students who qualify, which was also announced at the January 6 School Board meeting. Curriculum, testing, and performance standards are determined by VDOE. See also the presentation on Ongoing Academic Support and Assistance given at the January 12 Board meeting, with supporting PowerPoint deck provided to the Board on January 11.

19. **Question:** I am concerned about the general decline in mathematics competency that the data is showing across all levels. Do we have an equivalent to PALS or literacy screening for mathematics at the elementary level? Do we have other indicators besides grades for how our students are advancing in mathematics, short of standardized SOL testing? What are our plans for remediating mathematics instruction? (Wall)

**Answer:** We do not have a PALS type assessment for mathematics from the state. We do have highly structured mathematics assessments developed by the Math Office and well-received by teachers. Locally developed assessments are being adapted for use with the MasteryConnect assessment-building platform in our Canvas learning management system that several schools are piloting this spring. The expectation is that they will be available for next school year. Elementary level remediation in math is ongoing and supplemental instruction is provided, as needed. Summer School will also be available for students who qualify. See also, response to PALS questions in the December 18, 2020 Board communication.

20. **Question:** Please give the board updated data on enrollment numbers through the most recently available months. Can we please see this data with specificity. If we have received this recently and I have missed it, please indicate where I can locate this data. (Wall)

**Answer:** Student enrollment data is provided to the Board monthly in Board communications. The latest numbers, current as of December 30, 2020 were provided to the Board on January 8.

21. **Question:** Do we provide child-sized masks/PPE for kids who may need one, for any reason? (Wall)

**Answer:** Child Size ear loop masks have been provided to schools. We have them in stock and schools can order additional child size masks through the supply warehouse.