

SBRSD's Remote Learning Plan Update- FAQ

This document was created in response to the questions posed by various members of the School Committee. We understand you are eager to hear from us about how the implementation of the remote learning plan is progressing. Our responses serve almost like a FAQ document. The team completed the questions both individually and together as a group (appropriately social distanced of course). We tried to answer as many of the questions as we could, and we fully anticipate doing this again in the near future as more information and guidance is received and as the process becomes more and more refined. Often there will be more detailed work done in the Sub-committees and at the Administrative level, so we kept these responses to the School Committee level. We are sending this ahead of the meeting for your review, and the Administrative Team will be doing a PowerPoint presentation with the items we want to highlight at the meeting. Both this document and the PowerPoint will be posted to the website for the public to view after the April 30th School Committee meeting.

Is it possible to establish a common protocol (platform, norms) for meetings district or school-wide (Zoom vs. Alt)?

Of course, anything is possible, but my short answer is that teachers need flexibility in order to do their best work with students. There are clear norms and expectations that are outlined in the Employee Handbook in the District's Acceptable Use Policy which is also part of the Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) that we have with the Faculty and Staff for this period of Remote Learning. Google Classroom and Zoom do tend to be the most commonly used platforms, but there are many resources available to supplement and support students and instruction at home. Also, to ensure that the issues around equitable accessibility are addressed, all assignments can be done via paper and pencil as well.

What are the implications of budget shortfalls on planning for next year?

We worked really hard to present a budget for FY21 that was both fiscally responsible and supportive of the District's Strategy for Continuous Improvement. The FY21 budget was based on the Governor's budget presented at the end of January. As of now, the advice is to wait for the House Ways and Means budget, and to expect vast changes in the figures from the state. The latest revenue projections are significantly less than anticipated, and many believe the HW&M Committee is waiting for more information before releasing their budget and looking to see if there might be federal aid available to fill the anticipated shortfall. It is likely that the District will be working with a 1/12 budget as it is unlikely that town

meetings will be able to be held prior to July 1 and the start of the next fiscal year. Towns could be facing the same reality. Ultimately, the goal will be to get a local budget passed as soon as we are able to. Some suggestions we are looking into include: Saving as much money as possible for use next year, setting up a Transportation Reserve Account, prepaying allowable expenses such as tuitions in an effort to keep next year's costs down, and thinking about using more E&D if you have it. Other things to keep in mind are that you only get reimbursed for transportation expenses that you pay and those represent expenses for transporting kids to and from school only. Using buses to deliver food or packets of work are classified elsewhere and those expenses are not reimbursable. Much more information is needed, but the Finance Subcommittee should convene to discuss developing a contingency budget based on the HW&M budget and the fiscal stress as a result of the pandemic.

Do we have any funds for running a more robust summer school program for more students? (remote if necessary).

Based on my response from above, the current FY21 budget did not have a more robust summer school program built into it. Per the Commissioner, there are two potential sources of funding available to Massachusetts - \$215m in Title I type funding from the federal government for K-12 Districts for which a process would need to be developed to distribute these monies, and \$50.8m in the Governor's Emergency Relief Fund which is available to K-12 and Higher Education. The Commissioner has said repeatedly that he would like to recommend that some of the \$215m be used to fund summer programming – this is the extent of the details on this for now. We anticipate more information in the coming weeks.

How are support services being delivered for special education students?

Special Education Liaisons are collaborating with teachers, service providers, and families to write Individual Remote Learning Plans, in an effort to continue to offer access to a Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE). The Individual Remote Learning Plans outline how and when individual or small group supports will be offered, through collaboration with other faculty and staff members and families. While Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) cannot be fully implemented as written during the school closure, faculty and staff are working diligently at reaching out to students and families to arrange ways to provide supports to access the curriculum and related services (Occupational Therapy, Physical Therapy, Speech/Language Therapy, Counseling services, etc.) necessary to fully access their educational programs.

What are the Director of Student Services' biggest concerns?

A plan for outreach, based on the DESE guidance document, Strengthening Remote Learning, to families/students who are not accessing remote learning, which includes identifying key staff members to communicate in ways that families can access. Additionally, we are considering all ways our students and staff can safely return to school (once cleared to do so). Our nurses are participating in discussions and will offer their expertise and medical input based on guidance from the Department of Public Health. Planning ideas are already being discussed, but it is too soon to know when our doors will open or what it will look like. However, all are taking their time to carefully consider the information available and nurses will consult with administration to make an informed plan.

How are we addressing student social-emotional health at this time?

District mental health professionals, along with other county and state organizations, have provided some valuable insight and resources to meet the social emotional needs and learning (SEL) of our students and families at this very challenging time. Administration is using their thoughtful guidance to make important decisions regarding supports and events to assist in alleviating some of the anxiety and stress related to the current national emergency. In addition, community resources, online activities and references from reputable sources, and strategic practices will be placed on the district website and updated, as warranted. Please see the resource guide attached.

How are we identifying and addressing needs of students who are traumatized by the pandemic?

In addition to their caseloads, school counselors and other contracted mental health providers are available to assist families and students by contacting them through their school email addresses or by leaving messages on their office voicemails, which are checked regularly. Regular outreach to students and families, who have accessed counseling services over time, is being conducted by school counselors, as well.

What kind of interactions is the Director of Curriculum, Instruction and Professional Development having with teachers?

My interactions with teachers and staff have been positive. I continue to be impressed with their willingness to adjust and adapt their teaching. Some of my interactions include:

- Sending out emails to teachers with resources for PD and remote learning, answering questions, and offering my support.
- Reaching out to various individuals with information relevant to their specific roles, for example our Title I Coordinator and FastBridge Coordinators.
- Attending faculty and staff Zoom meetings for the elementary schools (I have plans to be on upcoming Zoom meetings with the MS and HS in the coming week).
- Calling elementary staff by phone for check-ins during the early weeks before we started Zoom, and on a follow up basis as needed.
- Surveying the Faculty and Staff on PD.

How are you vetting the online resources?

I have been inundated with potential resources. I look for three things when I am vetting resources for families:

- Quality – Is this a resource most people would value?
- Accessibility – Is it free? Will most people be able to access this without experiencing frustration?
- Reliability – Will this be available for a reasonable amount of time?

Similarly, I consider the following for professional development resources:

- Quality – Does this offer high quality professional learning in an area that is aligned with our District Improvement Plan? Is this being offered by a DESE approved provider?
- Accessibility – Can teachers access this? What might need to be put into place if we decide we want access to this resource?
- Customization – What do *individuals* want to learn about that I can support them in customizing so the district can issue PDPs? What *partnerships* can we develop to design a series of PD aligned with our DIP moving forward. How do we use this event to motivate changes in our curriculum and approach to teaching and learning?

Are you aware of what teachers are choosing and what their biggest challenges have been?

I have a big picture of what teachers are doing, but we have not required teachers to report the details of their choices to us. I understand there are varying levels of quality, but that is not different than any school at any point in time. What stands out above all is everyone's effort to put forward their best effort.

Some teachers reach out with their challenges, and others either do not feel they need additional assistance or get that assistance elsewhere and do not necessarily come to me personally. I have let teachers know I am available and willing to help anyone who requests that. The biggest concern I have heard from teachers is the desire to ensure all students have opportunities to continue learning and engaging with peers and teachers.

Is there any Professional Development happening, or are we just staying afloat?

Teachers and Paras are engaging in PD when they are able to do so. Many individuals have let me know that they are using EdWeb and CES, and a couple have tried Sanford Harmony. A few folks have asked about some individualized PD. I am always willing to work with people to find or design something that meets DESE's standards so the district can issue PDPs. A PD survey went out this week to faculty and staff and will be further discussed with the Curriculum Subcommittee.

How are we providing staff development for this new form of project-based learning?

Project-based learning is a powerful practice that requires ample time for curriculum development. It is true that staff development in this area is important to effective implementation. Under the current circumstances, it is not possible to address this in any kind of systematic way. There are some teachers who have experience with PBL, but the reality is we will need to build this capacity over time. I have been talking with Maria Rundle and the hope is we will move forward with an opportunity for professional learning and curriculum writing with Flying Cloud as early as this summer.

Any interesting/surprising implications for next year's curricula?

I am eager to form a committee to engage in this work of curriculum, instruction, and professional development. It is important for our district to have a strategic approach to writing, revising, and improving curriculum. Woven into this approach should be a coherent plan for professional development that meets the needs of our faculty.

Any shared projects that are working. Are there any teachers who are collaborating on cross-curricular projects? If yes, what are they?

I have heard discussions of collaborative efforts. There have been some virtual field trips that have had cross-discipline aspects, some special area teachers have reached out with ideas, and grade level teams continue to work together. Teachers are working hard to meet the demands of remote learning. It is important to remember that teachers have never before been expected to deliver instruction in this manner.

This is an area for potential development, but we also need to keep in mind that collaboration is difficult under these conditions.

Are we working different aspects of this pandemic into the curriculum?

The Guidance Department and School Counselors are addressing concerns about the pandemic. Teachers and staff respond to students' questions if they arise. Perhaps in the future when this crisis is over, we can work on adding pandemics into the curriculum.

What are the greatest leadership challenges from the Principals point of view?

There are many competing priorities to manage. We agree there are two areas that stand out:

1. Ensuring equitable delivery of educational support for all students. This can sometimes feel like an impossible task with all the diverse needs. There is nothing we can put in a packet that replaces the face-to-face experience of being in the classroom. This is true for online learning as well.
2. Providing the most effective support possible to our dedicated faculty and staff. Everyone has gone above and beyond to reach out to their students, adapt to remote learning, and consult with concerned families. Just the simple act of acquiring the supplies they need to do their job has become a far greater challenge than ever before. The pandemic is happening in the lives of our faculty and staff too. They have their own families who also need their support. It's a lot for everyone to manage. We do everything we can to let people know how appreciated they are and to encourage them.

How much of the regular flow of staff meetings, department meetings, and supervision of teacher quality are continuing virtually?

A series of small group virtual faculty meetings take place every other week. Faculty and Paraprofessionals are participating in these meetings. Meetings with department heads, curriculum leaders, and committees are also continuing to take place online as needed. In addition to online Zoom meetings, we are having individual conversations with faculty and staff regularly through email and in person when they come in to prepare packets.

We are aware the quality of assignments is varied. Faculty members have different levels of comfort with online and remote learning. We noticed the packets improved the second time as faculty were able to better gauge what to include based on feedback from the first set of packets. We expect the quality to continue to improve as we are now moving from "enrichment only" to covering the state mandated "power standards."

What is working really well?

We are most impressed with the way all faculty and staff have gone beyond expectations to reach out to students and families. They have continued to make their relationships with students the top priority. Their communication efforts with families have been outstanding. They reach out multiple times when they do not hear from students. They have made strong efforts to put things together in paper form so we can address the equity issue for people who do not have internet access. This was a daunting process, and everyone has adjusted very well.

What are the participation rates of families?

Many of our families have embraced remote learning. We estimate that about 70% of our packets were returned with student work. Lending laptops to families and books from the school have aided in ensuring more students can participate in remote learning.

A small number of students and families have not participated at all. This concerns us, and we have continued to reach out to parents of students who have not engaged. We have not heard back from everyone, but we continue to reach out. Sometimes family complications have prevented engagement.

For the large majority, families have been responsive and supportive. Many meet us on the road on delivery days. There have been posters and cheers. We are hearing from families that they recognize the importance of the relationships between students and teachers.

How do you think your teachers are coping? How is morale with your teams?

Overall, most people are coping well. They are willing to do whatever it takes to support their students and each other. As we get new information it can be a challenge. It was a bit deflating when we heard we could not return to school.

People are finding ways to stay connected with families and each other to boost morale through social media. We think it's important everyone keeps in touch.

How is the "3 hours a day" guideline working out? Are there any accountability structures in place, or is it mostly a trust system?

No one is working just 3 hours a day. Most people are working many hours beyond that. It is not unusual for teachers to meet with students and families outside of their designated 3 hours due to the availability of families. Many teachers are working

more hours now than ever would have been required of them during the typical school year.

Some of the systems for accountability include:

- Communication logs
- Weekly summaries
- Bi-weekly faculty meetings on Zoom
- Family Inventory

How are seniors doing? Are they completing their course work?

This is a difficult time for seniors. It is disappointing and some students are in a grieving process. For the most part they are completing their coursework. There are some issues interfering with students doing their best, but the guidance department, counselors, teachers, paraprofessionals and service providers are working hard to support students. There have been situations where teachers have volunteered to bring things to students to help them so they can graduate on time.

What is being done to create a graduation experience?

Now that we know we are not returning to school this year; we are turning our attention to how best we can celebrate our seniors and give them a memorable graduation experience. We recognize the importance of recognizing the life event on the day it was scheduled to happen – so we will do so. Our hope is to find a way within the law to give students an in person experience if not now, some day down the road. We will survey the student body in early May to incorporate their thoughts on how best to celebrate their K-12 career at SBRSD.

Are there any plans for culminating projects for seniors to take place?

As mentioned above, now that the decision has been made to remain closed for the school year we will begin the discussions on how best to address and share end of the year activities and culminating projects for seniors.