

Health & Safety Steering Committee Meeting Notes - October 20th, 2021

Read full meeting agenda and member list [here](#).

Superintendent Booker welcomed everyone to the meeting and thanked them for continuing to contribute their time and opinions to assist the District in developing its COVID safety policies and procedures.

Discussion Topics:

Outdoor Meals in Inclement Weather - With rain moving into the Bay Area, much of the hour's discussion focused on balancing previous recommendations to have students eat outdoors whenever possible to allow for distancing while unmasked, with keeping them dry and comfortable. Superintendent Booker said school sites would be utilizing outdoor areas of campus that provided some cover and pop-up canopies were being installed wherever practical. While these measures could be considered acceptable for light rain, the potential for heavier rain later in the week has the District seeking additional input from the Committee about whether a threshold exists where students should be moved indoors despite safety concerns. Points made included:

- Current COVID case data shows a steady decline in Alameda County and throughout the Bay Area. Is it time to be more flexible with the District's procedures? Families have expressed concern that their children would be forced to sit in the rain and that the current policy is too harsh for the current conditions.
- COVID transmission the community is seeing is coming largely from individuals eating indoors without masks. The District can't move too fast in easing up on the rules.
- The COVID pandemic is far from over, increased opportunities for mixing of students in settings like indoor dining can cause another spike. District should not back down at this time and should focus more on teachers/staff receiving booster shots as immunity from original vaccinations is showing signs of waning.
- There are ways to minimize mixing such as having students remain in their cohorts while eating indoors. There needs to be some balance between safety and comfort.
- Students could also be encouraged to eat quickly, mask up and return indoors. Hallways could also be utilized with students spaced apart.
- Suggestions made would be difficult to enforce at the high school level. Students need to socialize and keeping them contained isn't realistic. Keeping students indoors would also interfere with teachers' prep time.

- Are there programs available to allow for families to test their students at home prior to sending them to school on a rainy day? Would be a way to provide extra peace of mind. Availability of tests would be a factor.
- Will eventually need to come to terms with the fact that COVID will be here for the long-term and that having some spread will be inevitable.
- Over the course of a school year, the number of days with heavy rain are few. Moving everyone indoors may be unavoidable but hopefully, with younger students soon eligible for the vaccine, it won't be as much of an issue.
- Parents could pick their students up and bring them home for lunch.
- Whatever the plan, messaging from the District needs to be clear. Students will not be forced out into the rain. There is non-COVID pathology to be considered if a student is forced to be wet and miserable all day while trying to learn.
- Students can be cohorted by vaccination status. Lunch periods could also be broken up into 15-minute periods within a class to limit the number of unmasked students at any one time.
- Our thinking and reactions are still often driven by fear. We want to be able to pick one solution and stick with it. That's not realistic right now.
- Can on-site testing increase prior to rainy periods? The District is adding a nursing position, but current testing levels throughout the District have already stretched staff's capacity.
- The California Department of Public Health is piloting a program for families to test at home, but would have to buy their own tests.

Student Vaccines - All age-eligible PUSD students are required to show proof of vaccination by Wednesday, November 17th. The District continues to collect information from families. Many have been identified through contact tracing efforts by nursing staff. The District has not been contacted by Alameda County about scheduling any vaccination clinics in preparation for younger students becoming eligible.

Alameda County Entering 'Yellow Tier' - Previous recommendation of the Committee was for the District to reconsider its outdoor masking requirement when cases in Alameda County dropped to 5 per 100,000 (currently at 5.8 as of 10/20). Suggestion to maintain the requirement for elementary school students until they are vaccinated. Lifting of outdoor mask requirements for younger students would also potentially make them ineligible for modified quarantine under current guidelines. Discussion of what constitutes 'close contact' for students on the playground. Staff will research the definition and follow up with the Committee. Will there be family buy-in to PUSD's policy if it is perceived to be more harsh than that set by Alameda County?

Next meeting - Wednesday, November 17th, 8:30am