

1. Have you given any thought to working families and the situation we are all in?

Absolutely, we have. The impact of the pandemic on all working families has been at the forefront of our minds every day since March 15, when the Governor issued orders to close schools. Every day since then has involved considering and feeling the impact of our situation and decisions on students, staff, and families. Making a decision about opening schools back up to in-person instruction vs. staying in remote learning was very difficult, and presented very challenging dynamics regardless of the decision made. Our goal has been to provide accurate information to families with as much lead time as possible in order to allow families time to consider and make arrangements as needed. We do know that this is extremely difficult to manage, no matter how we approach it.

2. What am I supposed to do about childcare?

This is the hardest question to answer. We simply do not know. We are watching for opportunities that we will be able to pass on to district families that can provide support in our area. We are committed to sharing anything legitimate that we come across that may be helpful for our district families. Childcare is very important to us, for our community and for our employees. This is the reason we expanded our PreK programs last year and offered expanded childcare offerings at that time. We know that it matters. But, the school district is simply not able to solve this problem at this time. It is our hope that employers in the area will identify and consider this issue with their employees and develop means to better support their employees, if possible. As mentioned previously, we will be watching and staying attentive to anything that develops that will be helpful, and are truly sorry for the difficulties that are created by this situation.

3. What about childcare for essential workers?

This question connects in some ways to the previous childcare question. Regarding essential workers, the information we have received from the state indicates that status as an essential worker was largely tied to the emergency response period of the COVID-19 era during the spring, when it was most important to support the healthcare system and ensure that it was not overburdened and that healthcare staff were available to respond in the emergency period. As a state we are no longer in that emergency period, and the statewide expectation and perceived obligation to provide care for children of essential workers is not a dynamic that is in play at this time. This does not make us feel any better about the ways that we know remote learning impacts families with parents in positions that were deemed essential in the spring. It is still a burden that we know that our families feel.

4. Why can we go to restaurants, schools, groceries, etc. but it is not OK to have our kids back in school? The hospital is doing fine, as well.

The simplest answer to this question is that a day at school for a child is remarkably different from a visit to the grocery or a restaurant. The risk of prolonged interactions, proximity that cannot be avoided, and the sheer magnitude of numbers of individuals in schools creates different challenges. What we have seen is that circumstances that bring large numbers of people together indoors, even

with precautions taken, result in cases of COVID-19 emerging. Many of our employees are vulnerable, and many of our students live with people who are vulnerable, as well. Comparisons between hospitals and schools in the COVID context (or in any context) miss the mark. Hospitals are places of extreme cleanliness with standardized protocols for managing hygiene and health. Hospitals are professional healthcare workplaces that are built upon these concepts. Schools are filled with children and the adults who are trying to help them learn. Expecting that we would have the ability in schools to maintain a level of safety and cleanliness in line with hospitals, where health care professionals engage in that type of work daily, is unrealistic.

5. What about the science? Physicians are saying kids 10 and under should be back in-person at school?

Some (not all) doctors are saying that we should be focused on bringing students aged PreK through 10 years old back to in-person school. Some studies support that stance. Others contradict that approach. As you know, our plan for in-person and hybrid learning that will be implemented when we do return to in-person instruction accounts for exactly that. However, that push for children up to 10 years old to be in school is based on the belief that students in that age bracket do not carry or spread the virus the way that students aged 11 and up do. The dialogue supporting this belief has not yet addressed the inherent vulnerabilities of the staff members who are working with those younger students. Additionally, the push for younger students to return to school in-person is also based on the concept that the social and emotional side of school will be restored. To the contrary, we believe that with the current health and safety restrictions involving facial coverings, social distancing, no physical contact, and limited physical and social interactions, the school environment will feel remarkably different from "normal" school and will be overly-constraining to our students as well as incredibly difficult to manage. Some childcare centers and camps, with very controlled attendance quantities and tight protocols, have done well. Others have done poorly. Schools operate in a completely different environment and scale than do child care centers and even reduced-attendance outdoor camps. Any risks faced in those settings are exponentially magnified in a school context.

6. How will this work with remote learning? I didn't like it and my child was not successful in the spring.

We fully expect our remote learning systems to be much more structured than the emergency version that we created on the fly this past spring. Parents and students will be able to expect very clear schedules of what will happen and be expected, and when. There should be no wondering about what is going on. Our teachers and support staff will more effectively be engaged with students and families to ensure that this process goes well. You will begin hearing from principals very soon with school-specific detail as things firm up.

7. What about the importance of in-person school? Why would we do remote? Other places are doing in-person.

There is nothing we would like to see more than every student and staff member in school and in-person on the first day of school. We know that in-person instruction is the most effective way to help students learn and support them. But, we are also in a pandemic, which especially threatens our vulnerable students, staff and community members and will continue to do so until it is no longer an issue. Our decision to begin the year remotely while we take the time to observe what goes on in the

surrounding community, refine our practices and protocols, and become very skilled at remote learning (which we are likely to have to utilize at various points in this school year), is the safest and most logical approach for us as a district. Other school districts have made decisions based on what they think is best in their own circumstances. We have done the same in our community.

8. Why can't we just bring people into school and deal with cases when they come up?

This is a reasonable question. The answer has to do with what is involved when that type of situation occurs. According to the Health and Safety Guidelines issued by the state, when there is a case of COVID-19 confirmed with an individual who has been in the school, a number of things are required to happen. The spaces that a confirmed individual has occupied have to be closed to any use. Those spaces have to sit unused for 24 hours before cleaning and disinfection begins. Contact tracing will be conducted by the Department of Health and will likely require those who have been in close contact with the individual to face quarantine and not be allowed back in school for the designated period of time that is required. Throughout the process, individuals' privacy must be protected and maintained at all times. The superintendent is then required to consult with the Department of Health about the case and make a local decision about keeping the school, or district schools, open.

Ultimately, one case confirmed in one of our schools will shut down multiple classroom and public spaces that we would need to access in order to operate the school in general. One case may require numerous individuals to be quarantined, and will most likely result in either an individual school or all district schools being closed to in-person instruction based on the superintendent's decision. At this time it makes much more sense for us to not invite that type of situation into our schools. We would be much less prepared to manage remote learning overall under those circumstances and would also be less skilled at offering remote learning to those who were required to stay at home due to vulnerability or quarantine. We are ultimately attempting to provide families with some level of predictability and consistency in terms of what to expect and plan for in September and October while we monitor the situation. Opening in-person at this time would create a lack of consistency and result in probable immediate changes to our programming based on unexpected circumstances. We believe that this would cause much more harm and disruption to families than our plan to utilize remote learning from the start of the school year.

9. What about my Stafford student? How does this affect them?

We are still committed to providing transportation to Stafford for students who need that access. Knowing that Stafford has offered families a choice between in-person and full remote learning, we will be waiting until that decision deadline (August 5th) passes and our MRU administration will be in contact with Stafford to identify what the specific students' needs are. Transportation needs will be sorted out at that point in time.