

Transcript to Superintendent's Update, Nov. 13, 2020

Hello Forest Hills families. I want to come to you with a brief video update today about where we are with the pandemic and school operations. I want to talk with you about challenges that we've been experiencing as well as successes. In terms of our challenges, we know that with the increase in cases that has been dramatic in the last several weeks, that this is having an impact on all of us. How it's impacting us in our schools, really two big areas: that's our staff levels and quarantines. And for our staffing levels, we've had issues where staff need to stay home because either they're quarantining themselves because of a close contact in school or away from work, or situations where they're awaiting test results or a family member's awaiting test results.

And that's a big point, I want to emphasize if anyone in the household is being tested, everyone else in that household needs to stay home until that one household member gets their test results back. We don't want to have a situation where the spread of the virus has taken place in a household before symptoms show up and that creates more quarantine situations. So we do have staff members who are away from work for all of these important reasons to not spread the virus or if they are quarantining, and also staff who may not be feeling well. In previous years they come to work, and now we're asking folks to stay home. So that's affected our instructional operations that's affected a transportation operations, food service. So that extra dose of precaution is something for our staffing levels that sometimes makes it difficult for us to operate that's a big challenge that we've had.

Also quarantines are another big challenge. Quarantines happen when someone is a close contact with someone else who's tested positive. So this happens if a parent tests positive the children need to quarantine. So they're out of school, or if a student comes to school and later determines that they were positive and symptomatic, people who are close contacts around that student need to quarantine.

How we're working with that at the secondary level, we've moved to the hybrid option to really cut down on the number of students in a building so we can have maximum social distance, so we don't have as many quarantines. At the elementary level, though it's more rare to see positive cases at the elementary level, we do have them and they're really coming again from that household transmission. In those cases in large part, what we're doing is flipping that entire elementary class to a remote teaching and learning model during that quarantine period and then when that period is done they come back to school. So those are challenges we know that we're facing, we know that families are dealing with these challenges as well.

We know that when we can't operate because of staffing levels or transportation operations, that provides a burden to our families as well. Another challenge that we're all facing, and this is what I've heard loud and clear from our health officials, and that is the upcoming holidays are prime opportunity for this virus to spread even more and impact more people. And what I've been asked to share with everyone is to urge people to simply stay with the people in your household for the holidays, not to gather with people in your extended family. Try to avoid gatherings with friends and others. It's when we're in those indoor gatherings with the larger groups without facial

coverings, that's ideal time and environment for this virus to spread. So I'm just passing that along from our healthcare experts as well.

Now for some successes. We continue to see very little evidence of transmission of the virus within our schools. It's not that it doesn't happen. It's just a rare occurrence that we see and we really think that's because of the mitigation strategies, the face coverings, the hand-washing, people doing the health screener everyday, staying home when you're not feeling well and the like.

Our students continue to inspire us every day. Our teachers and staff members are working incredibly hard and I do have to say that our teachers and our staff members are tired. It's taking a toll, but when they see kids it gives them a bounce in their step. I know that. Teachers and people who work in schools do this work because they love kids, they care about kids, and it does our hearts good when we see kids smiling, when we see kids happy, and we're trying to keep as much of a normal situation for them as we possibly can.

We must continue to work together and not let our guards down regardless of the situation that we find ourselves in, whether that's at work, at school, and especially at home, and those times after school and after work, we don't want those times to be an afterthought and forget about these important mitigation strategies.

At this point in time, we've been asked to continue to do all we can to keep our schools open and that's our intent, but we do know with these challenges on

the staffing front, we do know the challenges on the quarantine front, that it may impact some of our school operations.

We're continuing to monitor things every single day and this is a fluid situation. So if things were to change or we need to change our operations, we will notify you as soon as we possibly can.

But in the meantime, whether you are a Ranger, a Husky, or a Hawk, we are all in this together. Thanks for all that you are doing to support our kids, to support our community, to support the people on the front lines, either in our classrooms or in our hospitals. We appreciate all that you're doing. Hang in there and take care.