

Dear OSSD Community:

I wanted to share information from last night's School Board meeting so that folks can plan for the coming days.

First, I want to apologize for the issues with Google Meet last night that some folks experienced. Google had shifted about a month ago to restricting meetings in their free platform to sixty-minutes and 100 participants. We had called at that time and made arrangements with them to have those restrictions removed which they agreed to do, and we have held meetings that exceeded those limits in the past month with no issues, so we're not sure why the meeting was limited to 100 participants last night; the tech team is working with Google this morning to figure it out; if they can't guarantee this won't happen again, we'll be switching meeting platforms.

After much discussion, the Board unanimously voted to have the schools remain in remote session following the Thanksgiving break until such time as conditions in our community allow for a safe return. For me this means when we are confident that all individuals with COVID-19 and all their close contacts have been identified and are in quarantine so that we do not risk further contamination in our schools.

Since this current event started on Sunday, we are still waiting on over twenty test results. Once those come in, we will have to contact trace any that are positive. It is possible that this process will last through two or three incubation cycles. Further, every day since Sunday, we have been notified of new cases, unrelated to our current clusters that need to be investigated.

This current event did not start in the schools, it began in the community due to a number of social gatherings. People at those gatherings were exposed and then carried that exposure into our schools –with the highest concentration being in our three elementary schools. At current count, closing the district when we did kept eight eventually positive individuals from attending our schools while they were in their infectious periods. This number will likely change as the testing results come in.

One of our COVID coordinators who spoke last night relayed to the community the attitude of about 1/3 of the families the district communicated with as part of contact tracing: they simply did not care. Many expressed very clearly their resistance to quarantine and some explicitly stated they would be non-compliant, including some who had already tested positive. This does not bode well for what our communities may face over the next few months.

I commend the 60-70% of the community that are taking the guidance seriously and in doing so helping us keep the schools open as much as we can. We need the other 30-40% to come around as well, because our having to go into remote session was preventable. If we all work together, if we follow the guidance, and if we quarantine when we must, we could even return to full in person instruction despite what may be happening in the greater world outside.

Our goal is to return to hybrid session as soon as it is safe to do so and move eventually to full in person instruction for all students, but we need everyone's help if we are to get there. We do not take going into remote session lightly – it is a last resort when all else fails because we know the impact it has on working families, especially those who may not have access to childcare.

I need every family and community member to think about the Thanksgiving holiday.

- Are you planning to travel, especially out of state?
- Are you planning on have folks visit?
- Are you planning on hosting or attending social gatherings that include people beyond your immediate household?

If so, you may be delaying our ability to exit remote session.

I do wish each and every one the best holiday possible under these conditions and I for one give thanks that we still have time to turn this around.