



District News Briefs

Return to School 2020 - 06.04.20

Expect Respect

For additional information, please contact Supt. Barb Rains, Ed.D. at 815.469.9103

Dear District 161 Staff and Parents-

Over 100 years ago, a pandemic swept through the United States and Europe. This pandemic is seen by some historians as an important benchmark to learn lessons in the face of the current coronavirus pandemic.

In 1918, symptoms may have initially been viewed as a minor cold but played out, as in 2020, with health systems quickly overwhelmed. In 1918 it was understood that crowds could cause further transmission of the virus. Among the closures were schools which is our current reality in 2020. In 1918, preventative measures included hygiene, disinfection, and quarantine of those suspected of being contaminated. Current guidance from the Illinois Department of Public Health/Center for Disease Control (IDPH/CDC) are considerations and guiding principles that can help protect families and staff to slow the spread of COVID-19.

The gamechanger was that technology allowed us to utilize a remote working environment and a remote learning environment during the pandemic – which was not without its frustrations and high anxiety levels for staff and families.

Fast forward to Fall 2020.

Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) recommends we create plans for the 2020-21 school year which include in-school learning and/or continuance of remote learning. At 4 p.m. today, we received guidance from ISBE on summer school and other allowable activities. In the communication, ISBE indicated it will provide additional instructional and planning recommendations in the coming weeks to support teaching and learning in the 2020-21 school year.

As you know, Illinois moved to Phase 3 of recovery at the end of May. Based on various reports, it is anticipated that this phase may end late July/early August. If the Governor directs Illinois to Phase 4, schools will reopen.

Despite what phase we will be in during August, we have immediately begun our review of the considerations and guidance. The CDC indicates that districts must determine, in collaboration with state and local health officials, whether and how to implement its considerations while adjusting to meet the unique needs and circumstances of our school community.

We have developed a District Oversight Team and held three lengthy meetings this week. The team includes managers of buildings and operations, as well as building and district administration. The focus is to review CDC considerations for (re)opening schools to in-person instruction during the COVID-19 pandemic. Additionally, building-based teams are being developed to analyze CDC considerations in each building.

Our process focuses initially on input from teachers and administrators. We must first address the big picture to develop plans for the beginning the year in remote learning or beginning the year with in-person learning.

In terms of a remote learning plan, we reviewed End of Year parent survey of what worked well, barriers to learning, and considerations for Fall 2020. We are co-developing a teacher survey to provide a similar End of Year survey for teacher input along these same areas.

The abrupt change to remote learning in March found us utilizing whatever we could to make remote learning work. We now are investigating with teams of teachers, coaches, building techs, and

administrators a learning management system solution that could be used to simplify the process not only for remote learning but in-school learning as well.

While this is a great deal of information to share, there will be much more to come. This topic impacts each family and each staff member. Please know that agendas and meeting notes will be posted on the District website and District app beginning June 8 to keep our school community informed. We will provide opportunities for family and community input as we continue to address CDC considerations while adjusting to meet the unique needs and circumstances of our school community.

By working together, we will be ready for whatever we need to have in place to begin Fall 2020.

Sincerely,
Supt. Barb Rains, Ed.D.

Summer curriculum work focuses on review standards, plan to bridge gap in Fall

A summer curriculum schedule of Zoom meetings has been developed to bridge the gap between the 4th quarter power standards from a student's previous grade level to the next grade level to determine areas of support needed at the beginning of the new school year. Through the month of June, various grade level team members may participate in the meetings to address power standards and then the conversions of standards from quarters to trimesters. The coordinators of curriculum will be facilitating the work along with the Director of Curriculum.

Several curricular initiatives to continue

In terms of the summer support, several software programs will remain open until the end of July when students are rolled over to the next grade level: Freckle (K-8), Raz-Kids (K-4), Lexia (intervention only), and Reflex math (K-4 students and intervention only 5-8.) In the Fall, our differentiation strategies initiative – Guided Reading and Math Centers/Stations K-4 – will resume. Additionally, we will offer Action Lab (5-8) and Freckle (K-8) and will continue with our work on Districtwide Power Standards (K-8). Additionally, we will resume Assessment & Grading Committee meetings when sustainable in-person learning is in place.

**Please watch for additional communication over the summer
as we plan for a smooth transition to start the 2020-2021 school year!**