



Smart Restart Update

11.16.2020

Dear Fargo Public Schools Families and Staff,

On November 16, the Fargo Public Schools (FPS) COVID-19 Instructional Plan Committee met. The committee reviewed data and discussed what protocols and changes need to be made in our schools to achieve the FPS COVID-19 Instructional Plan Committee's goal to bring students back to the classroom for full-time in-person instruction while also upholding the four guiding principles of the committee, which include ensuring the safety and well-being of all students and employees.

Per recommended guidance from local healthcare agencies, a modified return to in-person instruction plan was presented to the committee. This plan was modified following guidance from Fargo Cass Public Health and Dr. Paul Carson, a leading expert on infectious diseases in our community. The plan keeps the current instructional model in place for all levels for the remainder of the first semester. **The goal now is to return to in-person instruction for all grade levels beginning January 19, 2021.** Rationale for the modified plan is provided later in this message.

The committee adopted the modified plan. The plan includes a **tentative** timeline to return to in-person instruction. The timeline below is a **goal** but is subject to change as the committee continues to review data and guidance specific to COVID-19.

Elementary Schools: Level 4 – In-Person Instruction (4 days per week) until January 19, 2021

In-person instruction four days a week allows the opportunity for FPS staff to connect and support students that are quarantined or isolated during the distance learning day for all other students. Therefore, transitioning to five days a week with a significant number of students continuing to be quarantined or isolated can create additional gaps for learning loss.

Middle Schools: Level 3 – Hybrid Learning until January 19, 2021

Per the updated guidance, the phased-in approach for middle school students has been changed. Based on the modified plan, the goal now is to return all middle school students to in-person instruction beginning January 19, 2021.

High Schools: Level 3 – Hybrid Learning until January 19, 2021

Rationale for Modification to Phase-in Plan to Bring Students Back

On Thursday, November 12, 2019, representatives from Fargo Public Schools and West Fargo Public Schools met with representatives from Fargo Cass Public Health, Dr. Tracie Newman (FPS School Board Member and Sanford Health pediatrician), and Dr. Paul Carson, who is an expert on infectious diseases, to discuss the recent rise in cases in our county and the rise in children being impacted.



Information was shared that there may now be new research (early stages) suggesting that, although children are unlikely to develop significant illness from infection, they may be just as likely to acquire infection, carry it in high levels, and spread it to others at similar levels as seen in adults. District administrators and healthcare professionals also discussed the upcoming Thanksgiving Break and Holiday Break in December. Based on the current expectation that the trajectory of COVID-19 cases is towards exponential growth and is likely to lead to an even greater surge after the Thanksgiving Break both nationally and locally, guidance was provided that FPS should finish out the semester with the instructional models we have in place (Elementary – four days/week, Secondary – hybrid). It was shared by Dr. Carson that when students are in schools for face-to-face instruction, they are likely – at some level – contributing to the community spread. However, he also stated that the efficacy of transitioning to distance learning as a mitigation or safety strategy is questionable when it isn't coupled with or followed by other significant measures in the community. Moreover, it was discussed that K-12 students and staff are being exposed to COVID-19 more outside of the school setting than they are within the schools. It was also discussed that negative effects of reduced face-to-face instruction may actually outweigh the potential COVID-19 spread benefits.

Although guidance was provided two weeks ago that a phased-in approach for secondary (one grade level at a time) was recommended, it was shared that a major factor in the phased-in approach was the upcoming holidays. It was shared that if the committee chose to accept the guidance and adjust the goal to return to in-person instruction on January 19 (second semester), Fargo Cass Public Health, Dr. Carson, and Dr. Newman felt comfortable with all secondary students coming back at the same time. This is because January 19 is more than two weeks after the extended holiday, allowing students and staff to go through an incubation period following an extended holiday before returning to school.

Although the FPS COVID-19 Instructional Plan Committee's adopted plan sets a goal of returning to in-person instruction for all grade levels beginning the second semester, which begins on January 19, 2021, **Fargo Public Schools may need to transition one or multiple buildings to distance learning for set periods of time due to staffing shortages.** Critical staffing shortages continue to create operational challenges that may lead classrooms or schools to transition to distance learning while working toward the goal established by the FPS COVID-19 Instructional Plan Committee.

Though the committee adopted a plan with an established timeline as a goal, it is important to know that the committee will adapt and make changes based on new information or guidance, if needed. **The timeline referenced above is the goal of the plan that was adopted.** If guidance and data require a change or delay in this plan, the committee can exercise that option at future meetings.



The goal of the Fargo Public Schools COVID-19 Instructional Plan Committee is to help Fargo Public Schools reach Level 5, where all students and staff can safely return to in-person instruction. We appreciate all families and staff members of Fargo Public Schools for their grace, understanding, and flexibility.

Student Activities

Additionally, on Friday, November 13, Governor Doug Burgum announced a suspension of all winter sports and activities until December 14. Remaining November contests including girls' swimming and diving, as well as volleyball, are exempt and will be allowed to complete their respective state tournaments. For the Governor's full order, please [click this link](#). Due to this, all FPS student activities will be on pause until December 14. While disappointing, we look forward to the time when our activities can begin again for our students.

Community Support

As stated in previous updates, we are all in this together. We have a high number of staff and students out of school due to the spread in our community, either due to positive cases or individuals being deemed household or close contacts. Therefore, our ability to provide in-person instruction five days a week can be dependent on the number of cases in our county and the exposure to our students and staff outside of school. I urge all of us to make the best choices as possible for us to remain able to educate our students in person. Please follow recommendations and protocols to help stop the spread of COVID-19 – stay at home when not feeling well, wear a mask when around others within six feet, and wash hands frequently.

This is a time to come together as a community and do all we can to stop the spread of COVID-19.

Sincerely,

Rupak Gandhi, Ph.D.
Superintendent

