

February 3, 2021

Dear Parents,

I write to you today feeling more optimistic than I have in a long time about the pandemic and its impact on our ability to safely return to the classroom on a more full-time basis. In Oklahoma County, the number of Covid-19 cases is trending downward. That trend is also evident in our local data.

In addition, some district employees over the age of 65 have begun to receive their vaccines. And, at Monday's board of education meeting, board members approved an agreement with *Total Wellness*, a private, third-party provider that will offer Moderna vaccines to all employees who desire them. The Moderna vaccine has an 80% efficacy rate 14 days after the first inoculation. While the vaccines will be provided by the Oklahoma City-County Health Department (OCCHD), this agreement with *Total Wellness* will allow us to hold a mass inoculation of employees soon after the vaccine shipment to facilitate a quicker return to full-time in-person instruction.

I wish I could share that we have a target date to begin vaccinations, but distribution of the vaccines from the federal government to states has varied from week to week. I can share that once we receive word that vaccines are available, we will be able to put our vaccination stations into place in just a few days. To allow for social distancing, we will hold the events at two of our high school auditoriums. Our initial plan is for certified employees to be vaccinated on a Wednesday and support employees on Thursday. Total Wellness, an approved OCCHD vendor, has promised us enough nurses to deliver 2,000 vaccines in two days.

If the district only receives vaccine shipments in smaller allotments, there will be a tiered approach of vaccine distribution that will focus on staff members' ages, comorbidities, and amount and type of daily student interaction. While not mandatory, it is our hope that all employees will be vaccinated. The results of our recent employee survey show more than

73% of our staff plan to receive the vaccine. About 18% are undecided, and 8% have indicated that they will not receive the vaccine at this time.

While I would propose to the Board of Education returning four days a week—with Wednesdays set aside for teachers to create remote lessons for students in isolation or quarantine—it will ultimately be up to the board members to determine when and how we return to increased instructional days.

This week, we are convening a Covid Advisory Committee and along with our operational departments, the committee will review current safety protocols, evaluate the most current research concerning Covid, and study the current state of Covid in our schools, our community, and other school's actions. The committee will advise the administration and the Board of their findings. We believe that this work can be completed in the next two to three weeks. Additionally, district administrators are beginning to plan for if, and how, staffing needs will be met if we return to more full-time, in-person instruction. Any change to our current delivery of instruction is complicated; every move has a consequence that must be considered.

While there are reasons to be positive, the virus is still with us; and our return to a more full-time method of instruction is dependent on all of us continuing to follow the CDC guidelines of wearing masks, social distancing and washing our hands. It's also worth repeating to please keep your children home from school if they are showing any signs of Covid-19. They should also stay home if they have recently been exposed to someone with the virus and are awaiting a test result.

It will take our combined efforts to ensure a safe return to school. Nobody wants your children back to a more full-time schedule than I do, but we must do it safely while offering the best virus protection possible for our dedicated staff.

Sincerely,
Bret Towne