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MONTGOMERY COUNTY COMMUNITY
CONVERSATION ON VIRTUAL LEARNING 10/19/2020
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10/19/20 MCPS BOARD OF EDUCATION COMMUNITY CONVERSATION ON VIRTUAL LEARNING

BOE members Wolff, Smondrowski, Silvestre, Asante and MCPS senior leadership were present. MCPS staff gave an update and then there were Q and A, with many great questions submitted. The focus was both virtual learning and plans for return to classrooms.

Many of the MCPS responses were the same as those given in the summer. Ms. Wolff pressed for more concrete answers and timeframes a few times.

Notes are organized by topic instead of by chronological questions and answers.

TECHNOLOGY (CEVENINI)

- Mr. Cevenini explained difference between ParentVue (Synergy) and Canvas. Synergy has the grades of record and will house more information including high school consortia applications and athletic forms. The grade discrepancies (lack of syncing) between Synergy and Canvas created so much confusion for parents that the grade feature has been turned off in Canvas. (Side note – that was how I tracked the status of completion of current assignments, so it will be a problem if Synergy is not updated more often with pending assignments).

- The reason ParentVue (Synergy) was implemented was because the old system was not secure enough for maintaining data privacy. Also, parents requested features not available in the old system.

- IT is having discussions with the Synergy vendor about an updated feature where parents can cc their spouses/partners on email to teachers.

- Class recordings – they are not being posted for all classes (parents and students have raised the issue).

- Turner – CARES money has been spent on technology, Chromebooks, MiFi.

SURVEY RESULTS (DISTANCE LEARNING)

I didn't catch every number and detail, but here are the main points.

PARENT SURVEY: 27,888 RESPONSES
- Gave demographics of responses
- More than 70% satisfied with school support and connecting with teachers
- About 55% satisfied with Wednesday structure of learning and teacher check-in time.
- The biggest challenges to learning were distractions in the house, balancing parent work with helping children, need for screen breaks, and knowing what a child should be doing.

STUDENT SURVEY (GRADES 6-12): 8435 RESPONSES
- 64% think using the internet is easy
- 50% think the distance learning technology is easy
- 41% satisfied with social/emotional support
- 47% satisfied with materials and instructional support
- 38% did not feel connected to other students and part of school community
- 43% thought the learning model had a negative effect on their social/ emotional well-being.

INSTRUCTIONAL STAFF SURVEY: 6128 RESPONSES
- 46% thought distance learning tools are difficult
- 73% are happy with their school leadership's communication
- 45% disagreed that there is effective individual learning support

- 80% said most students participated in virtual class in the past week

ENGAGEMENT

- There is a parent academy "to go" with speakers/presentations, chats with parents, and technology how-to help.
- There were some parent videos. One suggested adding virtual lunch and recess. Another suggested homework being posted at the end of each learning day.
- There is a family engagement advisory team (FEAT).

VIRTUAL LEARNING EXPERIENCE AND NEEDS (WILSON)

- CARES money has been spent on tutoring.
- 35,000 students participated in the summer (there were 85,000 seats).
- There is fall tutoring available at every level and there will be an outreach to families. You can contact your school. This tutoring will continue into the spring even after the Dec deadline for CARES spending expires. This is for all students, those who need extra help and those who need enrichment.
- Schools provided workbooks, ask school if you need them.
- Younger students should take breaks from the screen.
- Considering more asynchronous learning opportunities at the elementary school level with support for families.
- Students who don't learn well virtually, especially elementary school – contact the school. There could be individual support provided by teachers not assigned to classes.
- Schools have autonomy for their schedules.
- There were adjustments to grades at the elementary school level (no grades the 1_{st} 9 weeks because of new curriculum). But there are no plans for further changes or semester pass/fail.

- Diagnostic assessment information will be provided to the BOE on October 27. Want to determine learning loss.

SPECIAL EDUCATION STUDENTS (LOWNDES)

- They should have a case manager.
- Special education students and the youngest learners will be back in buildings when the metrics are set and everyone goes back (the same timeline as other students). (Side note – I think he meant when metrics are for hybrid return).
- These parameters for return include in person education for autism programs, including those for students with high functioning autism.
- Also, they are following CDC guidelines for direct care givers.
- Speech services are being offered online – talk with your case manager.

RETURN TO SCHOOL (TURNER AND MCGUIRE)

- Questions about metrics and timelines
- Turner – following health data, "when it is safe"
- McGuire – no one answer, set of factors, in close contact with local health department, following federal and state metrics. Wolff pointed out that Montgomery County is in the range of the positivity rate and cases per 100K to consider return.
- McGuire - there are "unique circumstances" for Montgomery County that are different from neighboring counties. So even if neighboring counties return to school before 1/21/21, MCPS might not.
- McGuire – robust safety practices in place and in planning, including extensive ordering of masks and face shields, hand sanitizing stations, and signage. Will follow metrics for capacity.

- McGuire – air filtration – following industry standards for filters, they are making modifications in buildings, and there is ongoing purchasing of supplies.
- PTA is on design team to help preparation for in person learning.
- Turner – parents will be notified about the status of reopening in the coming weeks. MCPS wants a sustainable plan and also to focus on improving virtual learning.
- Wilson – parents will have an option of full virtual online or hybrid. MCPS is working diligently to have different types of hybrid models. The questionnaire will be sent to parents in mid-November to early December.
- MCPS is learning from other schools around the country.
- Teachers will follow ADA framework and family medical leave act.
- The earliest groups back for high school will be seniors, 9_{th} graders, students not on track for graduation, and some vocational programs at Edison.
- Silvestre – they are planning for hybrid return 2_{nd} semester, small groups back in school before then.

SENIORS/HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

- PSAT scheduled for Jan 26, question if MCPS will administer. McGuire – evaluating with college board and health officials.
- Some complaints about senior photo shoots with large groups of unmasked students. Turner – most students are responsible, wear masks, and distance.
- Smondrowski requested information about plans for seniors at the next board meeting (as well as responses to unanswered questions).

SCHEDULE

- Two half days before Thanksgiving are for parent teacher conferences (moved from October to be less disruptive to the schedule)
- McGuire – election day is still a day off so that employees can vote and because voting will occur at high schools (side note - I didn't understand the issue with high schools being used).

DISTANCE LEARNING AND EQUITY

- Wilson – 1510 students were not engaged a few weeks ago. That number is down. And it will go down further because there were elementary students who were enrolled, but only for speech and language services. They should not have been counted in attendance for virtual classes.
- MCPS will individually track the remaining students

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