

SCHOOL UNION 76

BROOKLIN – DEER ISLE-STONINGTON CSD – SEDGWICK

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Office of the Superintendent

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“Public Schools not only serve the public, they make the public.”

Superintendent’s Memo

To: SU 76 Parents & Guardians
From: Christian M. Elkington
Re: Several Updates
Date: 11-3-2020

Please know when I start my emails to you with *“I hope this memo finds you and your family well”*, I really do mean it! The health and well-being of our students, staff and you - our parents and community members - is always on my mind, most especially in this time of COVID-19. Your health, your child’s health and our staff’s health has me constantly wondering if there is something more we should do or think about. The one constant I am betting on is that by continuing to work *together* to reduce the chance of spreading COVID-19, we will all be better off.

There are so many questions that are bubbling up as the spread of COVID increases in Maine. Below is the most current information I can provide at this time.

What happens when Hancock County turns yellow? The SU 76 Board approved (August 2020) Reopening Plan calling for the same instructional and learning expectations to be followed for a Green or Yellow designation within our county. This continues to be possible because of our student-to-teacher ratios, our available space and because you, our parents, are transporting a majority of our students and making it possible for our bus transportation to meet national COVID-19 safety guidelines. Combined, this allows us to follow the highest and safest guidelines that the Maine DOE and Maine CDC have provided under both designations.

What are our current safety practices? SU76 Schools with support from our staff and students, are doing their best to follow the recommended 6ft. distancing guideline in our schools rather than using the minimum expectation of 3ft. This does not mean that we are doing this perfectly, but overall students and staff are doing well with this expectation. Mask requirements are being followed (with some students needing reminders) and desk shields, which most Maine districts are not providing, are providing an extra layer of protection. With some assistance from instructional staff, our custodians are doing extra cleanings of highly-touched surfaces throughout the day. We have supplied each room with an individual fan to improve air flow and are working on ventilation upgrades. Our buses are at about 70% capacity for Maine CDC's guidelines of 1 student to a seat thanks to parent/guardian support! It is a successful “TEAM” effort!

So, if and more likely when, our county is designated as Yellow there are really few, if any, extra steps we will need to take as we are already meeting state safety expectations for school reopening under the Yellow designation. I am confident that we are well situated to continue to

follow our present instructional model for having school open under either a Green or Yellow designation, as long as there is not a significant outbreak within or near SU 76. As Maine CDC and Maine DOE have said, designating a county Yellow does not necessarily mean there is the same level of concern for community spread in each district throughout the county. Each district could have very different numbers of cases and community spread scenarios and so a review of the situation in SU 76 will need to be done quickly.

What happens if the number of reported cases in SU 76 Communities or those near us start to rise? We are monitoring the number of reported cases in our area as closely as we can. Should numbers of positive or suspected cases dictate increased concern, we will contact Maine CDC and Maine DOE to determine if concern of community spread is warranted and what adjustments to our present plan need to be taken. If needed, I will immediately consider remote learning options, short- or long-term, and will convene “special” School Board meeting(s) to get approval of our plans should we need to look at a long-term remote learning decision.

What if a school gets a positive case? Even though each situation is different, our “rule of thumb” will be that:

- The school which has a positive case will be closed for one day for extra cleaning & sanitizing.
- If a bus is involved, it will receive extra cleaning & sanitizing.
- If the bus has students from a number of schools we will decide if closing several schools for a day for cleaning and sanitizing is needed.
- We will follow Maine CDC’s guidance for Contact Tracing and requirements for quarantining.
- Staff, parents and our communities will be contacted as soon as possible with an update along with present and future plans.

What about open classroom windows? Starting this week, an extra layer of warm clothing is advised for students! As we continue to learn more about COVID-19 we are finding out more information about how important air flow and air-exchange is. Fresh air is most important, but we now face challenges brought on by colder weather. We must pay attention to the fact that COVID cases are increasing. We don’t know if it’s because of people not following guidelines for social distancing and mask wearing or if it’s because as it gets colder activities are moving indoors. Regardless of the specific reasons for this rise in cases, we must rely on the most up-to-date guidance we can get to decide how to move forward and protect our students, staff and communities.

Air flow within our buildings is a concern as we move into the winter months. For most of the fall windows in classrooms and offices have been open most of the time to allow for better fresh air exchange. Now that it is getting colder we can’t just close windows, but need to adjust how we have them open. Yesterday we started to work on this and will be making adjustments as we determine what will work best. This means that we will be losing some heat in each room and that overall our rooms and schools will be cooler. **We need your help in sending your children to school in warmer clothing (sweatshirts, long johns, a couple of shirts etc.) Layers are great!** Having your son or daughter wear multiple layers to school will allow them to find what works for them. Having windows ajar on our buses will also be a common practice, so students who ride the bus also need to be dressed warmly and expect cooler temperatures on their bus run.

I know this won’t be easy, but we all know that nothing is during a Pandemic. Because we know that fresh air is an important part of the equation to keep people healthy and in reducing the spread of COVID-19, we need to do all we can to keep fresh air flowing into our schools,

classrooms and buses if we are to keep our schools open during the winter months. *THANK YOU in advance for your understanding* as we work on the best solution possible, this week and in the coming weeks. **As we have done many times before, over the last several months if parents need assistance, this time with winter clothing for your children (gloves, hats etc.) in providing necessary clothing please contact your school's principal for confidential assistance and it will be provided.** We are a TEAM!

We need to make more preparations for the worst-case scenario! As we see COVID cases rise in Maine and, in particular, in two of the counties around us, SU 76 needs to make more preparations for moving to full remote learning for all students. It's not what we want, but we must be prepared to do. So, over the next week, we will be doing some in-class practice with students using the technology they will need at home. From this practice, we will get some understanding of the problems that exist and must be fixed, but it won't be enough. We will need to also have some time practicing with students while they are at home. This will mean a day that all students will be required to do their learning from home. We will need a remote learning day. At the moment, I am looking at Friday, November 13th as a possible remote learning day throughout SU 76. I will be sending out more information later this week to confirm this.

What is going on with school sports? A working group has been meeting with representatives from the state, Superintendents and the Maine Principals Association (MPA) to look at winter sports. Independent of the working group, the MPA last week postponed the start of the Winter Season and did not give a new start date. Sunday, Governor Mills reduced the size of groups meeting inside to no larger than 50, which will impact the ability to have any spectators at events should winter sports return. We will continue to monitor this, but will not be looking at starting winter sports anytime soon.

Finally, I am concerned that the election may cause some problems that will affect our schools and especially our students! This is a particularly intense election, which is raising emotions and tensions. I have asked staff to be prepared to deal with heightened awareness and concerns of students today, as well as possibly this entire week. Even though we are not a big city school district, where protests have been the norm, we will probably see students, parents and fellow staff on edge or concerned with the outcome. If there isn't an immediate outcome, I am sure these concerns will rise. If there is an immediate outcome concerns from the side that loses or happiness from the side that wins will certainly be heard and will come into the school as students often share what they hear at home in school.

We can't ignore when we get questions or thoughts from students no matter their age. They are inquisitive and want to test out sharing their opinions. This provides a teachable moment(s) about our country. We will be looking at it as an opportunity to foster classroom discussion where differing opinions can be shared, and as an opportunity to model respect for those differing opinions.

Staff will not be sharing their personal opinions or beliefs about any candidate as it is not our role, but if and when the topic of voting and the election comes up they will be facilitating a discussion of student thoughts and/or answers to questions when they arise. That is our role.

Thank you for all of your assistance and good will over these many weeks, as together we are keeping HOPE alive within each of us, within each of our children and within each of our communities!

Thanks for taking the time to read the above!