

Update – September 29, 2020

Dear Parents & Patrons,

It has been a personal goal of mine to be as transparent as possible while serving as the superintendent of this amazing community. I have been told at times I compose a novel when a short story, or even a single paragraph, would suffice. Unfortunately, this is yet another time when I need to share with you a novel. Be prepared, this will be long, but I hope you hang in there to the end (especially you, love of my life; she often overlooks my communications, and then asks me what is going on).

**Please take the time to read this document in its entirety.**

I am sure almost the entire community is aware the school board is considering possible adjustments to our COVID-19 Response Plan (formerly known as our Re-opening Plan). We have taken the time to gather input from our stakeholders: parents, students and staff. Before I share the outcome of that input, and what will be my recommendations for possible adjustments, I want to address a couple of things.

1. I hope our parents, students, and community members understand that I want schools open. Each and every recommendation, change, adjustment, or sudden flip-flop has been done to accomplish exactly that: keeping schools open for our kids. I apologize for any and all hardship my recommendations may have caused our students and their families. **I believe schools are the backbone of communities, and I never want to do anything that might jeopardize that sentiment.**
2. While opinions were divisive and emotional, I also discovered a tremendous amount of support for our schools and our staff. I don't believe it is any secret that underneath my large stature and amazingly loud voice, is a huge teddy bear. I truly became emotional as I read each and every comment that came through on our survey. I will always say that without a doubt Blackfoot loves its kids, supports its schools, and is amazingly independent. That is exactly why I have stayed here for over twenty (20) years. **We will need that support if we are to overcome this latest challenge.**
3. I must admit I significantly misread the terrain on this one. I truly believed our community would "live" in the minimal zone, and only occasionally "visit" the moderate zone. I WAS WRONG. It appears we may be "living" in the moderate zone for a bit and what happens next is entirely up to us. We can go up, or we can go down. **Our actions moving forward will make that determination.**
4. I completely understand the concept of "herd immunity". In fact, the "Brian Kress" herd is not fearful of this current issue. However, a few years ago that would have been completely different. I am not sharing this out of fear, but the reality of herd immunity is that the entire herd does not make it. I am asked to oversee a herd of 3,900+ students and 500+ staff members. Please keep in mind, each of those individuals then goes home to even more herds. These smaller "family" herds include every type of circumstance you can imagine. Recommendations I make impact each and every one of those smaller herds. **This is a burden I take very seriously, and at times it weighs on me very heavily.**
5. We live in an amazing country, state, and community. I am grateful every day for the rights and liberties I enjoy as a result of being a citizen of the greatest country in the world, the most independent state in the union, and the most incredibly supportive community in the state. If you take time to reflect on how each of these great entities was created, I believe you will find a common thread; compromise. There are those who now believe compromise is a flaw or a sign of weakness. I, on the other hand, believe compromise created the country, state, and community in which I now reside. I am worried we are losing our ability to compromise. **We will need to make some compromises for the benefit of our kids.**

6. This second run at split scheduling has made it clear to me that if school is in session, there is no way to keep our kids separated. They want to be together, **THEY NEED TO BE TOGETHER**. I have had concerns expressed to me over the fact we allowed activities to continue even though split attendance for school had been set. Well, I had the pleasure of witnessing many events related to Homecoming 2020. I learned a valuable lesson, **if we can create the means for school and activities to continue, while doing things to lower risk, then we should do just that.**
7. **Our kids need school, and our teachers want to be there. So, what are we willing to do about it?**  
I truly believe in public gatherings there are two preventative measures which help limit exposure to COVID-19: 1) proper social distancing, and 2) proper wearing of face coverings. The only way to accomplish these two measures is either with split attendance (50% attendance), or a mandate for face coverings to be worn in school. I do not feel our community will accept a mandate at this time. Therefore, if we are going to limit our ability to properly social distance, then I am hopeful the district can offer a good enough “carrot” to encourage our students to wear face covering when and where appropriate. I truly believe the “stick” of a face covering mandate would likely put our staff at odds with members of our community.

These are just some of the thoughts I have used to formulate my recommendation. I have also considered the input we received from our stakeholders. I will now do my best to offer a summary of that input. The following options were given for consideration, and input was requested from parents and staff.

**OPTION #1 - Current Plan**

Minimal Risk = Normal School

Moderate Risk = 50% attendance schedule for all students (A/B or AA/BB schedule)

High Risk = Remote learning with staff at buildings

Critical Risk = Remote learning with staff working from home

**OPTION #2**

Minimal Risk = Normal School

Moderate Risk = Normal School PLUS Face Covering requirement for secondary schools (7th - 12th grade)

High Risk = 50% attendance schedule for all students (A/B or AA/BB schedule)

Critical Risk = Remote learning with staff working from home

**OPTION #3**

Minimal Risk = Normal School

Moderate Risk = Normal School for K-6th, 50% attendance for (7th-12th)

High Risk = 50% attendance schedule for all students (A/B or AA/BB schedule)

Critical Risk = Remote learning with staff working from home

**Option #4**

Minimal Risk = Normal School

Moderate Risk = Normal School

High Risk = 50% attendance schedule for all students (A/B or AA/BB schedule)

Critical Risk = Remote learning with staff working from home

We received over 1,000 responses to our request for parent input. The data clearly shows parents want an adjustment made to the current plan. Approximately 78% of our parents are asking for a change to our plan. The majority of those asking for a change want to see full attendance even in the “Moderate Risk” level. We received 339 responses to our request for staff input. The data shows approximately 56% of staff members feel the plan needs adjusted. Again, the majority of those asking for a change want to see full attendance even in

the “Moderate Risk” level. However, we must recognize this indicates 44% of the staff would like the plan to remain the same.

I did not send a survey to students. However, I did hold a meeting with the student leadership of Mountain View Middle School and Blackfoot High School. This was an incredible meeting. Our students really want and need to be back in school with full attendance. It was very clear to me that the inconsistency and changing to split attendance had an adverse impact on them. The conversation left little doubt that these students were willing to do whatever it took to have school with full attendance.

So, here lies my dilemma. I have taken a number of calls where I have been asked, what is my number one priority as superintendent? I truly hope it goes without saying that our kids have been and always will be my number one priority. However, in order to maintain each and every thing we do for our kids, we need a healthy and productive staff. I cannot meet the needs of my number one priority without our school staff. I need to do all that I can to keep our staff healthy and safe, so we can continue to hold school.

The recommendation I have prepared for consideration by the school board will have two parts: 1) an adjustment to our response of the different risk levels utilized by Southeastern Idaho Public Health, and 2) an introduction of Blackfoot School District close contact quarantine guidelines.

**Recommended adjustment**

I believe it is in the best interest of our students and our community to adopt option #4 as an adjustment to our COVID-19 response plan:

- Minimal Risk = Normal School
- Moderate Risk = Normal School
- High Risk = 50% attendance schedule for all students (A/B schedule)
- Critical Risk = Remote learning with staff working from home

**Recommended introduction of close contact procedures**

The Blackfoot School District strongly encourages the wearing of face coverings by students and staff when, and where, proper social distancing is not possible. The District Administration will take into consideration the wearing of a face covering when making decisions for the quarantine of identified close contacts. The District Administration will also share the preferred recommendation from Southeastern Idaho Public Health. The recommendation from the District Administration will follow the procedures below:

**Any confirmed positive COVID-19 case will be required to follow any and all recommendations given by their health care provider and/or Southeastern Idaho Public Health.**

Did the confirmed case wear a face covering?	Did the close contact wear a face covering?	District recommended quarantine procedures for close contact
Yes	Yes	Self-monitor for symptoms & continue to wear face covering
Yes	No	Quarantine for 14-days since last exposure
No	Yes	Quarantine for 7-days since last exposure & continue to wear face covering upon return
No	No	Quarantine for 14-days since last exposure

These close contact quarantine procedures are similar to the procedures most recently adopted by our neighboring state of Wyoming. I truly feel this could serve as an appropriate encouragement (carrot) for our students and staff to wear a face covering. The quarantine length for a student who chooses to wear a face covering despite a face covering not worn by the individual with a confirmed case is supported by information I plan to share with the school board when I make this recommendation.

I have chosen to share this information with our parents so that they are informed of the recommendation I will be making to the school board. If you desire to give me feedback regarding this recommendation, you are more than welcome to email me: [kresb@d55.k12.id.us](mailto:kresb@d55.k12.id.us) or call me at: 208-785-8800

Thank you for your patience and support as we work through this ever-changing situation. I truly believe this will improve our current situation, but I must admit that we truly do not know what will happen in the coming months. I will always do my best to keep our parents and patrons aware of developments that might require any further adjustments to our plan.

Sincerely,

Brian Kress