

Superintendent Recommendation to the School Board

Over the past two months, I have spent a lot of time observing communities, school districts, schools, classrooms, and a regional board of health. I have learned a few things:

- The majority of our parents are doing a phenomenal job helping us minimize the spread of COVID-19 in schools. Most of our parents are keeping their child(ren) home when symptoms of COVID-19 arise within the home. Thank you to all who are willing to do this. IT HAS MADE A DIFFERENCE IN OUR SCHOOLS.
- The 4-day school week has also helped us in minimizing the spread of COVID-19 within our schools. Believe it or not, but the longer weekend has made it easier for parents to identify possible symptoms and take the appropriate steps. Again, thank you!
- We have not done an effective job with A/B or AA/BB attendance. There are plenty of reasons as to why, and I am not sure there is any one person or group to blame. The fact remains our students, and our community struggle with alternating attendance.
- A district-wide approach may not be the best answer to our COVID response. Some schools are doing better than others, i.e. lower case numbers, stronger preventative measures, stronger community support for preventative measures. Why should those schools and communities be placed on an A/B type schedule when they are doing everything they can to keep their school open?
- Our students are showing signs of falling behind. Like it or not, our priority as a school system is to help families educate their children. Already having four (4) weeks of alternating scheduling during the first trimester has not been easy on our children and their academic progress.
- It might be a better response to do a short-term, possibly two (2) day, closure of schools at the high risk level than changing the attendance schedule.
- We need to finish the first trimester and take a closer look at where our students are and what can we do about it. If given time, with a focus on what needs to be done, I am confident our teachers can close the gap. The key is, THEY NEED TIME TO PREPARE.
- Finally, like it or not, we are not going to stop this virus. It will be in our schools. Only with preventative measures can we slow its spread. Parents, we need your support in any and all preventative measures. Please keep your child(ren) home if symptoms arise. Please encourage the wearing of face coverings by your child(ren) when social distancing is not possible. Please understand our most important asset in educating your child(ren) is our teachers and staff. If we do not have them, we cannot do our part. Please, please take this into consideration when deciding whether or not to follow proper preventative measures.

Now for my recommendation to the school board. My recommendation will actually require three (3) separate considerations by the school board.

1. I recommend that the Blackfoot School District remain at the moderate risk level at this time. As I have reviewed the state and regional health department guidelines for risk levels, I believe most of our schools are at the moderate risk level. I also believe there are a couple that would still be considered at the minimal risk level due to their numbers and preventative measures. It is clear to me, that solely using numbers as a basis, our schools have successfully navigated these conditions for over two (2) months. I do my best to monitor the situation at each school. We have had some close calls, when a short-term closure might be warranted. In each case, we

took preventative measures and have successfully slowed the spread of the virus without altering the attendance of students. I believe it is in the best interest of students to finish the first trimester with regular attendance.

2. I recommend that the Blackfoot School District develop criteria by which a school could be designated as high risk. Should a school be designated high risk, the school will be closed for at least two (2) days for increased sanitation and observation of students and personnel as to symptoms of COVID-19. This criterion will be presented for board approval at our next regularly scheduled board meeting.
3. I recommend that the Blackfoot School District school calendar be amended to hold professional development days on November 23rd & 24th. The purpose of these professional development days will be to collectively discuss how students progressed through the first trimester and how we need to respond, academically, for the second trimester. We have had a weeklong Thanksgiving break for several years now. I believe these dates are the best for our staff to regroup and prepare for the upcoming semester.

It is my hope these recommendations will allow our students to finish the first trimester and allow our teachers to properly evaluate the first trimester and prepare for the second trimester. One last time, I implore, almost to the point of begging, our community and patrons to follow appropriate preventative measure regarding public health and safety. I truly believe the vast majority of our students need school on a daily basis. I hope that decision is never taken from us locally, but the only way to ensure that is to have our COVID number decline.

In conclusion, these recommendations may very well harm my standing with some patrons and personnel, but I believe it is in the best interest of our students. Parents, if you are uncomfortable with these recommendations, then please let us know, and we can increase our offerings of our Blackfoot Online School Solution (BOSS) program for the second trimester. Staff, I am sorry if you perceive these recommendations as a lack of strength in my leadership, or a lack of respect for your safety and well-being. I do not make these recommendations lightly, and I hope you know my appreciation for your dedication to the children of our community. Students, we cannot be there for you without our teachers and staff, please consider taking consistent preventative and appropriate measures to keep them safe.

God Bless!

Brian Kress