

Health and Safety Plan Focus Group Questions and Outcomes
Forbes Road School District
July 20, 2021

1. Currently, mask-wearing is Federally mandated on public transportation, including on school buses and vans so Forbes Road must meet that requirement. However, the CDC's recommendation that elementary students (as well as older students and staff who are not vaccinated) wear masks at school is a guideline—NOT a mandate.

Should anyone be required to wear masks at school or should masks be optional?

Consensus: Masks should be required on school transportation to meet the Federal mandate but should be optional at school.

2. Last year, Forbes Road took a number of safety precautions during on-campus classes. These included maintaining cohorts that stayed in one room rather than mixing in the hallways or cafeteria, not using lockers at the high school, more frequent and intensive cleaning/disinfection, staggered bus arrival and dismissal times, placing additional restrictions on athletics, canceling extra-curricular activities, and tracking/publishing the number of COVID cases within the district's zip codes.

What practices do you think were beneficial and what practices were not beneficial?

Consensus: The practices that should be continued this year are more frequent and intensive cleaning/sanitizing of school transportation and facilities as well as tracking and publishing weekly local and county COVID cases. The group further supported continuing schoolwide breakfasts being offered in classrooms, not as a safety practice but because it is a healthy start to students' day.

3. The Cardinal Academy option got mixed reviews last year. Some parents valued online education as a safer option. There were also students who selected the option and did not participate, failing one or more classes. Further, there were complaints that some students were cheating. Teachers complained that recording lessons forced them to stay at their desks rather than working with students around the room. At the same time, student use of Cardinal Academy reduced the significant costs of outside cyber charter schools.

With the anticipation of a wave of Delta variant COVID cases this year, should Forbes Road offer an online option? If so, how should it be structured to overcome the obstacles encountered last year?

Partial Consensus: The focus group agreed that there should be an online option for students this school year. They further agreed that online instruction should not be

livestreamed by teachers as long as on-campus instruction is available. Instead, online instruction should be a “canned” program that may be customized by teachers should they choose to do so. Forbes Road teachers should oversee grading of assignments and tests for online instruction. The group further agreed that requirements for this year’s online option should be more stringent. Specifically...

- A. If a student’s grade falls below a “C” for more than two weeks in one or more online classes, the student should no longer be eligible for the online option.*
- B. Likewise, if a student does not substantively participate in one or more online courses for more than two weeks, the student should no longer be eligible for the online option.*
- C. Available technology and educational practices should be utilized to prevent student cheating.*
- D. Students may choose to switch from online to on-campus classes once during the school year but should not be permitted to switch back and forth.*
- E. Students should not be given extended periods of time to submit work or make up work and should incur the traditional penalties for missed deadlines.*
- F. If out of school due to illness, injury or quarantine, students who typically attend school on campus should work with the classroom teachers to make up work; online students should continue using the canned program to make up work at home.*

Some Lack of Consensus: The focus group struggled to reach a consensus on whether students who failed one or more courses last school year should have the online school option this year. After additional whole group discussion, a clear majority voted that all students should be permitted to attempt the online option regardless of their grades last year. However, failure to complete work or to maintain at least a C average in any class should result in no longer qualifying for the online option.

4. Tuscarora IU-11 will have free voluntary COVID testing available to schools this year.

Should Forbes Road consider using this option for random periodic samples of students and staff, during athletic seasons, for extra-curricular activities, for other groups, or not at all? If yes to any of these, how should it be structured?

Partial Consensus: The focus group did not want to use the IU’s periodic random COVID testing with parent permission because 1.) those who have had COVID may continue to test positive for months after recovery; and 2.) some focus group members reported knowledge of inaccurate results with the rapid tests. (One focus group member still felt that some data was better than relying solely on self-reporting.)

Some focus group members thought that symptomatic students should be tested at school with parent permission, but a larger number of members thought that students or staff who are symptomatic should be referred to their family doctor for evaluation rather than

testing at school. Individuals suspected of having the virus should not be permitted to return without a negative test or quarantine.

5. Health and Safety plans are now required to be re-reviewed by the School Board at least every six months. They may be reviewed more frequently.

Under what circumstances/number of positive cases do you think the plan should be reconsidered for a hybrid model (some days on campus and some days online) or an online model?

Some Lack of Consensus: A majority of focus group members agreed that school should be fully open with an online option or closed in the event of a COVID outbreak, but a few also favored a hybrid option where students spend some day of the week online and some days on campus as a possible alternative.

Most members did not feel comfortable choosing a specific number of cases that would result in a shutdown. One group did say they thought last year's 15 or more cases recommended by the State was a good number. Another group thought the school should close when there aren't enough staff to operate on campus. This could be essential personnel such as faculty, cafeteria staff, bus drivers, or maintenance staff. Other groups suggested getting more data and recommendations from health officials to make such a decision.

There was focus group consensus that if the school does have to close due to an outbreak that teachers should resume livestream/recorded instruction for students who had been attending on-campus classes. They further agreed that the Health and Safety Plan should be reviewed at least every three months while the pandemic continues to impact operations, any time there are significant changes in mandates or guidelines, and any time there is a substantial change in the number of county/local cases. Should the school have to close due to the pandemic, a majority of focus group members thought the plan should be reviewed every two weeks.