

COVID-19 Education Forum

September 10, 2020

5:33 p.m.

Present: Commissioner Stamper, Commissioner Fund, Commissioner Jackson, County Manager Erik Martin, Dr. Rachel Wood, Dr. Dana Anderson, JP Anderson, John Abplanalp, Dr. Jennifer Caserta of Northwest Pediatrics, Rebecca Minor of Northwest Pediatrics, Onalaska School District Superintendent Jeff Davis, Alison Puckett, Toledo School District Superintendent Chris Rust, Tammy Martin

Guests: Adam Campagna, Alicia Clevenger, Alicia Meehan, Andrea Potter, Angela Dickson, Annalee Tobey, April Root, Bob Hunt, Carin Forler, Casey Ruiz, Christine Moloney, Christopher Clark, Dana Shepherd, Dargie Sutton, Dawn Miles, Duane Bryant, Eric Brooks, Frank Corbin, Garry Cameron, Glenn Malone, Heather Pinkerton, Holly Orbino, Jennifer Humphrey, Joan Jahnsen, Joe Clark, John Hannah, Judy Anderson, Kasey Ramacher, Kathleen Kaut, Kathy Freels, Kelsey Aselton, Kevin Haughton, Kristi Tracy, Kyle MacDonald, Larry McGee, Dr. Lindsey Pollock, Lisa Contreras, Lori Lynn Eades, Marguerite Abplanalp, Maria Andrews, Maria Huang, Mark Freels, Marty Porrier, Megan Evander, Megan Schwarz, Melissa Crosby, Paul Charest, Nic Scott, Paul Farris, Peggy Floyd, Renee Robinette, Rick Goble, Robert Lucas, Ruth Peterson, Sara Sons, Sarah Alexander, Scott Nye, Sean Sowpe, Shane Schutz, Shari Watt, Stephanie Miller, Suzanne Wilson, Tanya Naillon, Tausha Zeh, Thad Parker, Theodore Holmes, Tim Webb, Trevor Mora, Christina Bradshaw, Dara Davis, and various other members of the public and press

Recorder: Rieva Lester

The commissioners introduced themselves and thanked the public and the panel for attending and staff for coordinating the meeting.

The commissioners introduced Dr. Dana Anderson, Superintendent of Capital Region ESD 113. Dr. Anderson gave an overview of the meeting.

Lewis County Public Health & Social Services Director JP Anderson gave a Powerpoint presentation about the efforts to reopen schools quickly and safely.

Dr. Rachel Wood discussed the efforts that went into her recommendation that schools open remotely in fall 2020. She outlined efforts to reduce the risks of in-person learning.

Dr. Jennifer Caserta of Northwest Pediatrics discussed her role in the weekly discussions regarding schools. She echoed the need to carefully balance the need to reopen schools with the need to keep children and their loved ones safe.

Onalaska Superintendent Jeff Davis, who noted he also sits on the committee, also discussed the efforts going in to reopen schools safely.

TO-DO LIST / RECAP

Staff: Create FAQ sheet

Angela Dickson of Infection Prevention and Microbial Consultants (IPAC) discussed infection prevention services her consulting firm provides. JP noted that the county will be contracting with the group to help area schools open safely.

Is PHSS only focusing on COVID, or is it taking other implications into account?

Dr. Wood and JP said the Health Department weighs many factors in its decisions, including social determinants, such as access to nutritious food, access to health care, home situations, etc.

Jeff Davis discussed social distancing needs – such as special needs, mask requirements and hygiene – that schools must follow in order to reopen. He noted that many schools are facing classroom size limitations due to square footage.

What is being done to address hacking, Zoom-bombing, etc.?

Dr. Anderson discussed efforts to protect schools and schoolkids from hacking. He said some schools have changed platforms away from Zoom and some schools are providing parents with content filters to protect schoolchildren.

Why are CTE classes and kindergarten classes to be allowed when other platforms aren't?

JP Anderson discussed conversations that took place regarding allowing Career & Technical Education (CTE) classes and lab classes to take place. He said those types of classes really cannot take place online. He said the scale of those classes also was taken into consideration. Dr. Wood echoed his thoughts.

Superintendent Jeff Davis said Onalaska will bring kids in for the CTE work that cannot take place at home, such as welding, using machines in the woods class, raising hatchery fish, etc. He also said some scientific labs simply cannot take place at home.

Why are grocery stores and daycares OK but in-person education is not?

Dr. Wood addressed why grocery stores and daycares may be allowed to open whereas schools may not. She noted that a grocery store checker would have far less exposure time than a teacher or the teacher's students. She noted that daycares are a much smaller scale than schools. JP discussed state and local discussions that took place early on regarding the risks.

Are the needs of at-risk children being addressed?

JP discussed special populations, such as foster children, who may be identified as those who need be connected with teachers for in-person contact.

Dr. Caserta said pre-literacy learners, special-needs children, abused children, etc., are groups the experts share concerns about. She said experts know that child-abuse reports increase in the fall as children from abusive homes return to school and interact with adults they see as safe.

Will schools screen for COVID?

John Abplanalp reviewed a flow chart outlining what screening for symptoms would look like. Onalaska Superintendent Jeff Davis said COVID testing will not take place but that health questions and temperature screenings will continue to take place, though parental attestation also will be offered.

How often will the Health Orders be reviewed?

Dr. Wood said the work group meets weekly and plans to make recommendations at least once a month.

How will schools address the transport of children?

Dr. Anderson said the state office of Education has provided guidance regarding transporting students. He said the group is recommending at-home screenings. He said options discussed have included temperature checks, assigned seating and increased airflow via open bus windows. Onalaska Superintendent Jeff Davis said Onalaska plans to follow the recommendations Dr. Anderson outlined, aside from temperature checks. He noted that Onalaska is working with a consultant to address transportation and other concerns.

Is COVID the only focus of concern?

Dr. Anderson discussed concerns regarding the effects of social isolation, distance learning and increased screen time. JP Anderson and Superintendent Jeff Davis also addressed concerns about social and emotional learning.

What's the timeline for schools to return to in-person participation?

Dr. Wood said the timeline for returning to school depends on how things unfold. She said the group will watch how the introduction of CTE and kindergarten classes unfolds as well as how incubation periods unfold. She likened the response to a dance. JP Anderson echoed those sentiments, noting that Lewis County is blazing the trail with its recommendations that schools consider some in-person learning opportunities. He noted that there will be people who say the county is moving too fast, while others will say it's moving too slow. Dr. Caserta said community infection rates also will have an impact.

What's being done to address internet issues?

JP Anderson discussed the county's efforts to expand internet service for area school districts. Onalaska Superintendent Jeff Davis said many schools have polled their families to determine internet access, internet strength, etc., and to help improve access. He said many schools are providing hot spots in addition to giving students paper packets. He said Onalaska has provided Chromebooks and flash drives as the district finds creative solutions to help students. He said 18 percent of the students do not have internet access. Of those who do, many had very weak service.

Toledo Superintendent Chris Rust thanked the county for grant funding that is helping the area school districts. He also thanked ToledoTel for its work to provide internet access for Toledo students.

Commissioner Stamper discussed the county's efforts to earmark CARES funding to help districts increase internet accessibility.

Mossyrock Superintendent Glenn Malone discussed the district's plan to offer in-person classes.

What benchmarks are used?

JP Anderson discussed the basis for state-issued benchmarks. JP said the R0 (R naught) value – a mathematical term that indicates the contagiousness of an infectious disease – is a main focus.

Does the county follow CDC guidelines?

JP Anderson said the county follows the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) guidelines. Dr. Caserta said her office reviews and synthesizes the data from the CDC and others.

Why would kindergartners be allowed to return when they often have less-robust hygiene habits?

Dr. Caserta said data from large studies points to an inflection point of age 10. She said that children younger than age 10 have been found to be less likely to contract the virus and less likely to transmit the virus. She said that – coupled with the greater need for in-person learning for young children – helped lead to the selection of kindergarten as the first in-person wave of learning.

Closing

Dr. Anderson thanked the public, the panel and Lewis County for the forum.

JP Anderson said Public Health & Social Services will work on an FAQ.

Erik Martin noted that video footage of the meeting will remain available on Facebook and YouTube.

Meeting adjourned at 7:13 p.m.