Response to Hastings Teachers Association Social Media Post

July 31, 2020

Dear Hastings Community,

It was brought to our attention that the Hastings Teachers Association posted a statement on social media about their participation on the School Reopening Planning Committee. We wanted to share with you some context regarding this Committee and the process for developing the District plan for reopening schools in the fall.

The Presidents and Vice Presidents of each collective bargaining unit were invited to serve on the committee so that they could represent the views of their membership. The President and three Vice Presidents of the Hastings Teachers Association represented their membership in each school. Similar to other situations, such as the development of the school calendar, the Presidents and Vice Presidents participate in this process on behalf of their membership.

The Hastings School Reentry Planning Committee included a number of subcommittees, one of which focused on exploring recommendations for instruction and technology. This group subcommittee met on the following dates: 6/8, 6/12, 6/17, 6/18, 6/29, 7/2, 7/8, 7/9, 7/14, 7/16. The group included administrators, the HTA President and a Vice President, PTSA/SEPTA representation, a technology specialist, high school students, and a member of the Board of Education. Conversations were also held at the building level with more teachers.

The subcommittee was described to its members as being advisory in nature. Over the course of the meetings, the discussion was inclusive of the following topics:

- Timeline for planning;
- Brick and mortar audit around bandwidth and technology for live streaming;
- Assessment tools currently in existence;
- Pros and cons of live streaming;
- Reverse live streaming;
• Flipped classroom model;
• The following hybrid/density models:
  ○ Half-day AM/ Half Day PM,
  ○ Two-Consecutive Day Rotation,
  ○ 4 Consecutive Day Rotation,
  ○ K-6 In/ 7-12 Out;
• Altaris (the District’s safety consultants) recommendations and their implications on instructional models;
• Logistics around remote learning;
• Definition of “High Risk” students;
• Services and provision of modifications to the curriculum;
• Student advisory;
• Scheduling cycles and considerations for scheduling;
• Potential use of document cameras for live streaming.

The majority of the committee’s time was centered on discussing potential hybrid scenarios, as this would potentially be the most difficult to operationalize and was one of the models the State Education Department directed school districts to consider for reopening of schools.

Members of the group, including HTA representation, were asked to indicate their preference for a hybrid/density instructional model. The two-consecutive day rotation became the preference after it was determined that it would not be feasible to have all elementary students attend on campus, with 7-12 learning remotely. The two-day consecutive model was subsequently also preferred by community stakeholders and faculty and staff in their surveys. Following the sub-group meeting on July 16th, it was agreed that the proposed models would be shared by a member of the HTA with teachers.

A Community Forum was held on July 21 to share the learning and instructional models that the four Rivertowns discussed given our proximity to each other. These models were in the Altaris Reopening Planning Guide that the reopening committee reviewed along with other documents.

On July 22, the President of the HTA informed the Superintendent that he no longer wanted the names of the HTA leaders listed on the Reopening Committee. The timing of this request was curious, as the only meeting left of the reopening committee was yesterday, July 30th, at 4:00 pm, which was scheduled for a review of the finalized plan. He also indicated that he would prepare a Memorandum of Agreement to define the “parameters of a potential hybrid model and an all-remote model of instruction.” By this, he was requesting the Superintendent to negotiate aspects of the reopening plan.
To be clear, the faculty and staff survey was administered on July 27, 2020, to enlist feedback about the learning and instructional models presented at the July 21 Community Forum. The hybrid model preferred by this group was the two-day consecutive rotation model, which is the model the district is adopting.

On Monday, July 27, a meeting was held with the President of the Hastings Teachers Association to discuss the Memorandum of Agreement that was prepared by them. The Superintendent indicated that after confirmation with legal counsel, that there was no need to bargain over the learning and instructional models presented at the July 21 Community Forum, as they were consistent with the HTA contract and/or subjects that did not require bargaining. Accordingly, the administration indicated that it would not engage in negotiations over the reopening plan itself.

Now that our School Reopening Plan has been completed and posted to our website, teachers will be working with Melissa Szymanski and the building leadership teams to develop a set of practices for live streaming and instruction to ensure that all students are engaged in substantive daily interaction as outlined in the NYSED Reopening Guidance document. This follows the model used with the twenty-one member K-12 educator focus group who met over the summer to develop signature (best) practices for Google Classroom and Calendar. If issues arise from the reopening that impacts the faculty, the administration will certainly entertain discussions with the HTA on how to address these issues.

Since March, the District has recognized the incredible dedication and efforts of the Hastings Teachers Association, the Hastings Administrators Association, the Civil Service Employees Association for the Custodial Unit, and the Civil Service Employees Association for the Clerical Unit, during these extraordinarily challenging times. We look forward to working together to implement the School Reopening Plan.

Sincerely,

Valerie Henning-Piedmonte

Melissa Szymanski