

HSA General Meeting Minutes -November 10, 2020

Introduction

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Fundraising Events

- Rite Aide- every qualified purchase and prescription refill will earn funds towards our HSA. Sign up by using the link below:
<https://rxfundraising.com/s/?id=MESMERIONSTATION>
- Book Fair- read the latest FYI for the many Book fair events. We are partnering with our local book shop, Children's Book World for this year's fundraiser.
- Linville Pies- The last day to purchase pies is November 15th. See the latest FYI to purchase pies. Pick up will be on November 19th.
- Amazon Smile- a quick and easy way to help raise funds for the HSA is to connect your Amazon purchases to Merion Elementary. Simply look up our school and mark it as your primary charity to where the funds should go.

Online Directory

The online directory is ready to use! Use the link below to register for MTK and to gain access to the directory.

<https://merionhsa.membershiptoolkit.com/>

Q&A Session with Dr. Albanese-

***the notes below are not verbatim but a summary of the discussion from the evening

Is it true that the school are moving back to full time virtual learning sometime soon?

Dr. Albanese- There was a board meeting last night and there were recommendations being made at the county and state level. I wasn't at that meeting but something must have been said because I received a lot of emails and texts this morning. We had a meeting today at 1pm and the information received was from a meeting that was held by administrators who don't ordinarily meet on Mondays so I knew something was going on. As of now, we're looking at extending thanksgiving and winter holidays. Assuming people will be travelling and number of different states are coming up with travel restrictions with recommended quarantine, the recommendation is to extend the holidays with remote learning (not school closing). The conversation then led to whether schools will be closed next week. Today during the 1pm meeting, there was not support to shut down starting Monday the 16th on any grade level. There's a board meeting this coming Monday to discuss the recommendation of school closing. For now we will continue the hybrid model as is.

Will there be consideration given to going back to full class mode if we return to virtual school?

Dr. Albanese- The challenge is trying to find the balance- some people feel that the hybrid is not long enough and other people feel the full day model was too much screen time so we as administrators are trying to find the happy median. Some of the variables we're running into include certain staff such as reading specialists, support personnel, intervention supports, math and English specialists, etc all who serve kids K-5. This presents logistical challenges trying to make sure our arguably most needy students, including gifted students, get the services they need that cannot be met in a hybrid model. We've been looking at this challenge for the last week comparing the remote model in the beginning and the hybrid that we've been doing currently. All the 6 neighboring schools prefer half the class on a zoom rather than the full class at one time. We're trying to find a way to accommodate those students but right now the hybrid model is meeting those needs opposed to the full day model.

If the kids are in school all day, are you saying there's not enough time for kids who need special services to get services?

Dr. Albanese- It's not about full day and half day, it's about getting those services to those kids who need them. If there are overlap in the schedule that happens in a full day model, then it becomes harder for the service providers to provide the service. Right now we feel the kids who are in a class of 11 and 12 students are getting the attention they need. If we constantly switch the schedules, it will upset some parents who want more consistency. In the end, we can't please all parents no matter what we do.

Have we considered making a planning day mid week?

Dr. Albanese- We have considered changing the planning day to mid week since most kids are "fatigued" by the end of the week so if they are in school on Friday it's more encouraging as they go into the weekend. Attendance seems to drop on Friday so the recommendation is to move the planning day to mid week.

How are the teachers doing in the school? How do we make sure the teachers are doing ok with the amount of stress there currently is? How do we know that the teachers are not in the classroom not under great stress?

Dr. Albanese- To be honest, some teachers are stressed out and scared. Some are uncomfortable coming everyday but they love being with the kids. Most everyone prefers to have kids in the school but in the same vein, they want everyone to be safe. If they had their choice, they would be doing what we're doing now- having kids in school even though this situation is not ideal. No one wants this situation such as not having a closer connection with the kids, kids can't play openly, not being able to have kids in small groups, and also thinking of how the masks impede their communication. As said in the last meeting, the kids have been amazing with their masks and keeping

their own and we give credit to the parents. Many people are anxious and teachers aren't immune to that.

I'm curious if there is a plan for kids who are ill or who have been exposed to positive patients for them to join the class by live stream instead of being completely asynchronous?

Dr. Albanese- At this time the administrators are not entertaining the idea of having live feeds that some secondary schools are doing. My kids for example are back in a hybrid model and the kids who are in school are on the screen for most of the time even though they are physically there. Until that model can be improved, the administrators are not considering that for the elementary level.

If the child has to quarantine for 2 weeks, how does that affect their attendance?

Dr. Albanese- The state has allowed changes in the attendance code and added the letter 'Q' to reflect that they are in quarantine whether it's a family illness or anything related to COVID and it doesn't negatively affect the child's record. What we're working on with the staff is having more check in time with kids who are in quarantine whether they do that early in the morning before the morning class or sometime during the school day. The teachers have been working on building in check in time for these kids who are out of school to make sure they are following the 'week in a glance'.

Is the school/district/county putting out any guidance around Thanksgiving and suggesting what families should or should not be doing?

Dr. Albanese- Families are going to do what they want to do. There's recognition that the numbers are spiking. The recommendations have changed throughout the summer. We would have to be at a metric that's considered a substantial rate of COVID positive and as of yesterday, it was at 5%. A few weeks or several weeks ago that would have meant school closure but right now it doesn't. Those metrics are fluid and always changing. The recommendations are coming from Mont County health department and their recommendations tend to change depending on what they're learning about the virus especially around transmission. We would share recommendations from the state with you as it pertains to quarantine and it requires flexibility from all of you.

Do you think the shutdown will come from the county or state or do you think that the superintendent can make that decision without the county or the state?

Dr. Albanese- My opinion is that everyone is afraid to make that official call. Even the state department of education and the governor do not want to make that call and be responsible for that decision. Other superintendents hope that the person 'down the road' will make the call first and then make the call for their school district. The state and county health officials have softened their approach because what used to be a mandate is now a just a soft recommendation and their metric has changed, e.g. 5% would close our school in the past and now it's closer to 7%. All counties are different

around us in terms of positivity rate so that's why the state is hesitant on making the call on closing the schools since everyone is at a different place.

What is the PSSA situation for this year?

Dr. Albanese- There has been no guidance yet. Most educators would not want the PSSA to happen. We rather rely on the locally developed assessments that better fit our community at Merion. The longer the instruction is different than normal years then the more likely there will be adjustments to the PSSA because those tests are already written with certain expectations and also have minimum standards that all public school are required to meet. These minimum standards are how the state holds us accountable but most districts do well on the PSSA because they are minimal expectations and most school districts want to achieve a much higher expectation so we would be fine if we do not have the PSSA this year.

When will they make that call on the PSSA?

Dr. Albanese- I don't know when they will make that call. The decision is usually made at the state level not the local level.

Dr. A noted we had a fire drill today. The fire drills look different now with the social distancing and the kids did fine. The kids and teachers adapted quickly to the new processes.

Do you have shelter in place drills?

Dr. Albanese- The shelter in place drills would require kids to be in close contact with one another in some way with the goal of being out of view from those in the hallways. The recommendations right now is for teachers to talk through that process with the students rather than doing the actual drill until we get different direction from the higher ups. Recommendations for shelter in place in Lower Merion continue to be hunker down, stay out of view, and be quiet.

Now that we are on the other side of the 2 week closure, is there anything you are able to share with us? What did you learn from that experience?

Dr. Albanese- I learned that the county doesn't mess around. I learned that the county will err on shutting things down especially if it looks like there is potential transmission particularly in a school. I learned contact tracing is driven by district folks. Teams convene quickly once we learn a staff has tested positive and they go right into the questions of who that person was in close contact and where was the staff in the school. Other questions include who met the criteria of 'close contact' with this staff? Decisions were quickly made to shut down the 5th grade classrooms first. Within less than 5 minutes of the meeting that happened on that Monday 2 weeks ago, they decided to close the school because they could not guarantee out that there was no transmission in the school. The county deemed that there were too many people

considered close contact with this staff and too many other individuals exhibiting symptoms so the county could not rule out the possibility that there was transmission happening in the school. To date, there were no other positive cases besides that one person. I also learned that while we can recommend testing, many parents decided not to test but to keep the kids in quarantine for 2 weeks which was reasonable for us because it is the recommendation anyway from the county if you have been exposed to a positive case. I learned that we have to look at all the variables and whether we can run a school operation without certain staff including transportation staff and teachers who may need to quarantine if they were exposed. Even if we don't get a high number of people who test positive but may have many who exhibit symptoms, this may lead to another shut down because we could not run the school with such a shortage of staff.

Was it an administrative issue that drove this recent school closure?

Dr. Albanese- We shut down because our county told us due to the concern that our site had a possible community transmission in the building. None of our protocols have changed since the closure.

**Can you clarify the 15 minute exposure to an individual who tested positive?
What metric is the county using in regards to this rule?**

Dr. Albanese- The school district is going to do what the county tells them to do. We are recommended to err on the side of caution and those who were with that person for 15 minutes even if it's not consecutive, it was recommended for them to quarantine.

We all expected the hybrid model to be a roller coaster ride which is why some parents chose LMVA and LMSD@home for the consistency. There are now parents who are interested in finding a virtual program because of the recent scare. LMSD@ home is beyond capacity. LMVA is different because once you start in August it keeps going for the semester so if someone starts mid way they are months behind. There is no catch up mechanisms for kids who start in the middle.

Is there an allowance for kids to change programs?

Dr. Albanese- LMVA allows that change. If folks wanted to join in person, we haven't denied that request so far. It's the other way that more challenging when we had to deny that request. The enrollment in LMVA is lower than LMSD@home so it's unknown whether there will be requests for families to go to LMVA after this semester.

Closing

next HSA meeting is December 1st at 7pm. Topic: Heathy eating and your elementary school child.