**THE SCHOOL DISTRICT OF**
**PHILADELPHIA**
**BOARD OF EDUCATION**
**GOALS & GUARDRAILS**

**Conversation Session**
**Meeting Notes**
**February 18, 2021**

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*What is a Conversation Session?*

Community Conversation Sessions are designed to allow for members of our school communities (students, staff, parents/family members, and community stakeholders) and members of the Parent and Community Advisory Council to meet with Board Members to *discuss important topics, issues, and give input into the work of the Board of Education.*

These sessions are an opportunity for the Board to engage in *two-way* communication with community members on Board work. Conversation Sessions began in January 2021. For more information, please visit our website: www.philasd.org/schoolboard/advisorycouncil/

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Parent and Community Advisory Council Hosts: Elyse Castillo & Catherine Blunt
Board Member/Host:  Maria McColgan
Other Board Members Present: Julia Danzy, Lisa Salley, Reginald Streater, Cecelia Thompson, Joyce Wilkerson
Agenda Topic: School Reopening
Number of attendees: 30
Stakeholder Groups represented: current/perspective parents, childcare providers, community members, current/former district staff

**Summary of Feedback Collected from Participants:**

*Q1: What does the Board need to know about a student's academic and socio-emotional needs as the District prepares to reopen schools?*

- There is already a social emotional gap and education gap because parents who are able to support their children are able to and we are furthering the gap.
- Trauma and stress need to be considered when thinking about the kids coming back into the classroom; Kids are dealing with their parents' stressors.
- It is important that we have systems in place to meet student mental health needs; consider reducing testing for students as it creates additional anxiety.

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- Disparities are going to be increased and we should hold off on hybrid-learning.
- Students are nervous to go back. Some students are doing better virtually.
- Socio-emotional supports that address trauma are key and should be resources available in classrooms. Especially as students transition back to school and particularly for Kindergarten students who have never been in school.
- Some parents fear that the hybrid model will take away from some children.
- On the other hand, we also heard that virtual learning has made parent communication easier; taking the good from virtual learning and applying it in a meaningful way.
- Kids have social needs that aren't being met virtually; they need to be around their peers; Socialization is necessary.
- Anxious for those children who are getting weekly covid testing. Particularly, special education students who are being tested without their parents there.
- Concerned about academic well being but more concerned about their emotional well being - there will be lots of anxiety and concern about administering standardized tests (keystones/pssa) as soon as they return.
- Hybrid learning is a flatter and less dynamic learning environment for students - private school experience shows that putting teachers in a hybrid environment is even worse based on her experience and creates trauma.
- Parent/guardian economic stability is directly correlated with the fear and anxiety experienced by our students - hybrid will create stress and anxiety.
- Board needs to consider students that are doing better in the virtual world and how they can maintain this option for them - how do we get them back in person in a smooth way as well?
- Speech therapists - there are some strategies that work virtually that don't work with masks in the hybrid world - as a professional my attention will be divided between students who are online and in person. She has better parent communication than ever better and better coaching for parents to support their children as well - I have learned ways to communicate with parents in new ways which has been invaluable.
- Academic learning will vary for students over the past year for virtual learning based on the skills they already had before. Social-emotional learning is harder because it takes more effort for students to reach out to their teachers virtually which would be much easier in person. Testing will be an issue for students because it will be new for them and will take time for them to get used to.

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*Q2: What guiding principles, related to the pandemic, should the Board consider when reviewing policies and action items in their decision making process?*

- It is important to understand the primary purpose of the hybrid model is; if the goal is keep classrooms small or give parents options the important thing is to focus on the problem that the district is trying to solve.
- Trauma informed practices and following the principles of the health department.
- Consider getting rid of punitive practices such as truancy, etc.
- Board should focus on student growth rather than progress/outcomes.
- Families expressed concerns about administrators not understanding the students culture and being able to relate to them.
- Teachers need to understand Philly culture and that is part of the support but as a parent also proud of some of the things she has seen her child learn. We shouldn't focus on the discipline we need to support students.
- We don't want them to feel pressured to speed through lessons rather there should be a focus to master skills.
- Families expressed concerns about ways that the District will support the needs of families and traumas that students will bring to the classroom. Questions asked included
  - What resources will we provide to them?
  - Who's going to handle the student's stressors and traumas that students will return with?
- Teacher attendance is a problem - there are schools at the bottom that have not made any progress - - Is there teacher attendance data for virtual learning?
- Policies shouldn't be one size fits all they need to be differentiated - we can't make assumptions across the board about our students. For example, why is online learning not working for some kids? Is it a departure from their previous experience as schools? Is this based on other traumas? What data do we have that shows what is working and what is not working with virtual learning? How can we think about problems more creatively?
- Parents have had the opportunity to see how different teachers interact and engage with their children. Some teachers have adjusted very well to virtual learning and some have not.

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*Policy Feedback*

*Policy 107*
- Are teachers prepared to support students in the hybrid model to support instruction? How are we training teachers to prepare for hybrid models?
- Teachers need to be given the resources they need to do their jobs during hybrid learning. There is discrimination that needs to be addressed by the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers.
- Decisions need to be made at the individual school level rather than district wide policies.
- Rather than one specific scripted curriculum or planned instruction across the District we need to have a set of guidelines and then teacher led professional development to get teachers comfortable with how to implement the pedagogy we want them to implement based on those guidelines. We also need to give teachers sufficient planning time.
- Policies need to be in layman's term for some parents and stakeholders - we need to explain who the audience is.
- The Office of Academic Support as a clearinghouse for planned instruction should be regulated in some way that is clearer than here. Who/What should that unit be in terms of qualifications, makeup, etc.
- If a teacher's planned instruction is not approved, is there a mechanism to appeal? Some teachers have innovative ideas that may not be standard or what is usual.
- Special education resources need to be heightened.
- We need to invest in parent communication to ensure they understand and have a way to document whether their child's IEP is being honored. Parents are leaving the District because they don't believe their children are getting the special education services they need.
- What is the process to provide input into administrative procedures? The procedures are where this stakeholder group can provide feedback that is meaningful.

*Open feedback*

- Data from the last monitoring session which focused on PreK-3 and I've shared data with you which all show that most of our schools are not performing.
- Parents of two children (1 in charter and 1 in SDP) are going through a hard time where they are having lots of anxiety - they are promising smaller classrooms with rotating teachers which won't be helpful - better to have virtual learning.

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- Teacher attendance is not the only problem.
- Board members make assumptions about schools - you need to find ways to hear other perspectives to hear feedback.
- Board needs to explain parameters and guidelines that you are working on - you need to do a better job of helping people understand that - someone needs to be able to share what your parameters are to help parents and community members explain.