

Information for Decision-Making Regarding the School Model and Plan for January 2021 through June 2021

What are some of the mission implications and considerations?

Some of the mission implications and considerations to balance are:

- Our students need intellectual, physical, social-emotional and other support and stimulation *and* our students need to be kept as safe and healthy as possible. There are many real and potential negative impacts, both short-term and long-term, for students if they do come to school physically *and* there are real and potential negative impacts if they do not come to school physically. Weighing the costs and benefits, and pros and cons of the situation with COVID is extremely difficult. There are no easy answers.
- This situation is extremely challenging for parents and families. It is stressful and worrisome to send children to school and worry that they may become sick or that they may bring the virus to school or from school to home. It is also stressful and logistically challenging to have children at home full-time or part-time and to not have child care or the daily support that school provides. For some families, not having their children in school has been devastating and has meant that they have chosen to leave the school. There are other families who do not feel at all comfortable sending their children to school.
- This situation is extremely challenging for guides and staff. It is stressful and worrisome to come to work physically and worry that staff may become sick or that they may bring the virus to school or from school to home. It is also stressful and logistically challenging to teach virtually and to conduct the work of the school virtually.
- City Garden is committed to centering our anti-bias, antiracism (ABAR) commitment and ensure that we are living into our commitments to equity and justice in our decision-making.
- City Garden is committed to centering Montessori in our decision-making and the delivery of our educational program.
- City Garden is committed to the transformational values of both/and thinking, an abundance mindset, collaboration and transparency.
- City Garden is committed to centering our children in all decision-making.

What are some of the financial implications and considerations?

Some of the financial implications to weigh are:

- Without preschool students in the building, we do not receive tuition revenue. This year we are already operating at a \$150,000 deficit for preschool. If we further reduce our preschool program, we will face additional budget shortfalls.
- Some families have chosen to leave City Garden to send their children to in-person schooling—between Fall, 2019 and Fall 2020, we have lost 38 students. 24 of those students are 2nd grade or higher, which means that they will not be replaced, due to our enrollment policy. For each student enrolled, we receive approximately \$9,400. In the

2020-21 school year, we are being “held harmless,” so we will not lose this revenue this school year. However, losing 24 students who can’t be replaced does result in about \$225,000 less in funding per year for the next several years.

- Operating the school in person with our current model is extremely expensive, primarily from a personnel/ salary perspective:
 - We have one or two staff members staffing classrooms with 3-8 students, which creates a much higher cost per student, since those salaries are not spread out among a whole classroom of students.
 - Hiring a school nurse is a great benefit but is a significant new expense.
 - We have hired several additional hourly employees in order to provide breaks and fill in when in-person staff are out.
 - Staff are out more due to quarantine, which adds expenses when we are paying both the quarantined staff members as well as their replacements (in some cases).
- We have faced significant budget cuts from the state (our June and July state payments were only 40% of what they were supposed to be), while adding significant new expenses (additional staffing, technology, additional supplies, etc.). We have enough funds in reserve to get through this school year operating under our current model, but after this year we will have to make different choices in order to keep revenue and expenses about equal.

What are the personnel considerations?

- We have been striving to be responsive to staff and allow each staff member to make the choice that feels best for them regarding working from home or working in the building. While we have felt good about this approach because it has supported staff in doing what they need to for themselves and their families, it has also presented some challenges:
 - We have had to change our programming and/or hire additional staff when staff members have changed their decision regarding being in the building, which has made it difficult to deliver our program consistently
 - There are some equity implications with this approach—some people end up experiencing higher risk and/ or carrying more or less of the “load,” and there is not an easy and straightforward way to spread out the work
 - We are not able to serve every grade level in the building
 - We are not able to serve all of the students who requested in-person schooling
 - Some staff members have opted to work at home but we still need their duties fulfilled in the building, which has meant paying additional people to perform duties while continuing to pay regular staff.

What are the community and “political” implications?

- Staff members’ feelings about the school’s plan has a significant impact on the success of the plan. Some staff members might be very happy and supportive of a particular approach, while some staff members might be very dissatisfied and angry about a

particular approach. COVID impacts everyone differently, and there is not one approach that meets everyone's needs and preferences. This can lead to staff turnover and conflict.

- Parents' and guardians' feelings about the school's plan also has a significant impact on the success of the plan. Some parents/guardians might be very happy and supportive of a particular approach, while some parents and guardians might be very dissatisfied and angry about a particular approach. This can lead to community conflict and/ or families leaving the school.
- Students' experience of the plan has a strong impact on the success or failure of the plan, since it directly impacts their progress and their overall feelings about school.
- The broader community often has and expresses opinions about our decisions. It is important to be aware of this and to take this information into consideration, while balancing it with all other feedback and information.
- Other schools and school districts' approaches are often referenced and compared—in the news media, among staff and parents, and among St. Louis residents and neighbors. It is important that we stay informed about what other schools are doing, even while we make our own decisions regarding what is best. (There is more information below about what some other schools and districts in the region are doing regarding their school plans.)

What are some of the legal considerations?

- City Garden is not legally liable if a student, staff member or parent/guardian contracts COVID on campus.
- City Garden has the ability, per DESE and the City of St. Louis, to determine a plan that works best for our school community. We do not currently have any in-person attendance requirements. This only applies for the 2020-21 school year, as of now. We *do* have requirements to deliver the Missouri Learning Standards and to ensure consistent student growth.
- City Garden must have a health and safety plan that is in compliance with the City of St. Louis. The requirements of the City of St. Louis are different than the requirements of the State of Missouri, which has made things somewhat confusing. We abide with the City health and safety requirements.
- There are many personnel policy changes due to COVID that we have had to keep up with. Staff members are not penalized if they must quarantine. Staff members can be required to come to work physically; however, we have chosen not to implement this since March, 2020.

Who is ultimately responsible and accountable for the decision regarding the school model and plan for January through June, 2021?

Many schools and districts have had their boards make the decision and/ or approve the school plan during COVID. While we have kept our board closely informed, and our board has shared

thoughts and questions, City Garden's board views its role primarily as governance—making sure the overarching structures are in place to implement our mission, that we are accountable and in compliance with all requirements, that we have the resources needed to implement our mission and that we are good stewards of these resources. Our board has viewed our COVID school plans an operational matter, and thus has left the decision-making to the leadership and the staff. Thus, Christie is ultimately responsible and accountable to the board to ensure the health and safety of students, staff and families, and for the delivery of an excellent educational program through COVID (this is one of her performance goals and will be included in her annual evaluation). However, the decision-making regarding our school model has been collaborative and has incorporated staff and families' needs and perspectives, scientific data and information, and operational considerations regarding what is feasible.

What are other schools and districts doing in January?

Some schools and school districts are planning to all or partial resume in-person schooling in January, and others are remaining all or partial virtual. Here is an overview of what some schools and districts are doing:

- St. Louis Public School District was 100% virtual until mid-October, with some schools open as resource centers for students. SLPS brought its preschool and early elementary students back to school physically in late October, while also providing a virtual option. SLPS's middle and high schools have remained 100% virtual. SLPS is tentatively planning to bring everyone who wishes to come back to school in person in January, while continuing to offer a virtual option.
- Other charter schools vary in their approach. All but a couple of charter schools began the school year 100% virtual, and most of them have been working to bring more students back to campus since October. Most charter schools are tentatively planning to bring students back to campus in January.
- School districts in the county have taken different approaches. Some districts—like Rockwood, Parkway, Clayton and Kirkwood—have provided a hybrid model and have worked to increase the number of students coming to school in person throughout the Fall, and are planning to hold in-person school or a hybrid approach in January. The Ferguson-Florissant School District while Ferguson Florissant has been 100% virtual throughout the Fall but is tentatively planning for a return to in-person school January 19th.
- Most private and parochial schools in St. Louis City and County have offered in-person learning or a hybrid approach, with some time at school and some time at home.
- Chesterfield Montessori is 100% in-person.

How are Parents and Guardians feeling?

- 81 parents/guardians responded. The demographics of survey respondents are not representative of school, as much higher % White families responded.

- 81 respondents: 17% B, 4% H, 1% A/PI, 1% Native American (NA), 3% prefer not to answer, 74% W
- A Majority of respondents are comfortable with returning to school.
 - 65% of parents/guardians were somewhat – very comfortable, 29% were Uncomfortable – Very uncomfortable
- White families are more comfortable returning to school than families of color
 - When comparing white parents (n=73) to parents of color (n=22):
 - White
 - Somewhat to Very Comfortable – 74%
 - Uncomfortable – Very Uncomfortable – 26%
 - POC
 - Somewhat to Very Comfortable – 60%
 - Uncomfortable – Very Uncomfortable – 40%
- White families are less satisfied with distance learning than families of color
 - White
 - Satisfied – Very Satisfied: 34%
 - Neutral: 40%
 - Dissatisfied – Very Dissatisfied: 12%
 - POC
 - Satisfied – Very Satisfied: 82%
 - Neutral: 18%
 - Dissatisfied – Very Dissatisfied: 0%
- Comment Themes:
 - Overall, families appreciate teachers and lessons they are providing
 - Well organized & good communication
 - LOVE Fab Fridays
 - Tech has improved
 - Parents/guardians are concerned about so much screen time and lack of social interaction with peers, some children feeling very isolated
 - Parents/guardians also having difficulty supervising their children and some feel this is necessary to ensure that work is completed
 - Many parents/guardians want more opportunities for their children to connect in person, outside

How are Staff feeling?

- 31 staff responded.
- Overall 20 staff, 65%, were between Somewhat – Very comfortable with returning to work in the school building.
- Overall 9 staff, 29%, were uncomfortable – very uncomfortable
 - 3 staff (10% were specifically very uncomfortable), all 3 were white staff members.
- There was no significant difference between staff of color and white staff.

Decision Proposal Synthesis

Date: 12-17

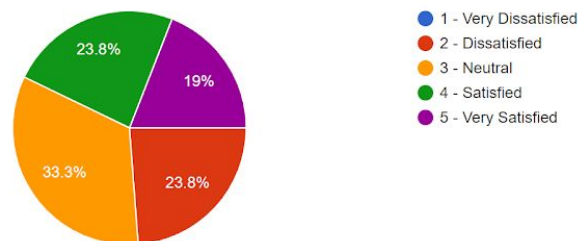
Completed by: Jo Pang

Overall Sentiment

- 20 Staff Members provided their input on the survey
- 43% of staff are satisfied or very satisfied, 33% are neutral, 24% are dissatisfied about the recommended decision
- 62% agree or strongly agree, 33% are unsure, and 5% disagree that this is in the best interest of the City Garden mission

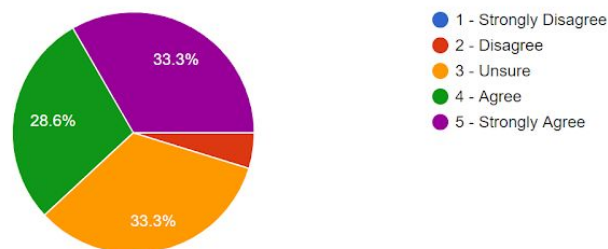
On a scale of 1 - 5, rate how personally satisfied you are with this recommended decision?

21 responses



On a scale of 1 - 5, to what extent do you believe that this is in the best interest of City Garden and our mission overall?

21 responses



- Themes on Feelings:
 - Skepticism and fear around the disease and conflicting research
 - Safety protocols and implementation are extremely important
 - Mental health - cannot make an assumption it will improve for staff - some will better from this, and some will be worse off mentally
 - Working at home is a challenge for some, and works well for others
 - This is the right thing to do in general for the school and for students
 - Different levels of comfort with coming in the building
 - Fear around poor experience of teaching both virtual and in person students at same time
 - Frustration/anxiety around change

Appreciations

- That a proposal for change is being suggested and we are looking forward
- The acknowledgement of safety protocols and keeping distance
- Appreciate consideration of the whole person
- More dependability and consistency
- More equitable to have a blanket expectation rather than personal decision
- The process of decision-making, open dialog, and having time to process and give feedback
- Focus on good of the whole rather than individual preferences

Improvements

- Suggestion to reintegrate staff in waves
- Strong implementation/transition plan
- Clear safety protocol and accountability
- Creative use of space: use some off campus spaces to do in-person teaching
- More choice for those who would like to stay at home

Implementation Questions/Needs

- **Grade-Level/Team Specific:**
 - JH and student return plan
 - General scheduling and coordination within grade level
 - Coordination between roles: lead guides, assistant guides, subs etc
 - Approach to navigating Virtual/In-Person students:
 - I will need clarity around what happens when I am with children in person and we still have virtual students. I can not picture how this functions in a Montessori space or how to create equity and teach with integrity for both groups. I will require very direct expectations and support if this is to be expected in the year.
 - I think that the classrooms are large enough to have both the assistant guide and the lead guide in the classroom. The assistant guide can support by helping the students in the classroom to stay engaged in their scheduled lessons while the lead guide is giving lessons virtually.
- **Safety Protocols**
 - Specific Needs:
 - Sneeze guard for working with students in close proximity
 - Mask with clear cutout for reading instruction if sharing space

- Entering Pods with Students: Are we trying to keep students only interacting with their pod? Can I enter pods to work with a student? I currently am and now wondering how negative of an impact I can be if I contract COVID for the current model
 - Bathrooms: cleaning, who can use what bathrooms
 - Protocol for if/when someone is exposed
- Accountability:
 - How do we ensure strict adherence to safety procedures with more people coming into the building.
- Recognition of Lived Reality:
 - I do not maintain 6 feet between myself and my students. EVER. Please tell me how I could possibly do that. I zip coats, wipe butts, tie shoes, open lunch containers, apply band aids. The list goes on and on.
 - I eat lunch every single day in a room with 14 other people. We all take our masks off. This is my reality. When a child approaches me, I put my mask back on as quickly as possible. I am willing to do this because it breaks my heart to think of children eating alone.
 - I need people to understand the realities of working in the building with children, especially children who are using shared materials and who are having a relatively "normal" Montessori experience.
 - I need a realism that social distancing will not be possible with so many people in the building.
 - Mask wearing will be used as a power struggle with students,, particularly with our high behavioral need students.
- **Transition Plan/Implementation:**
 - Time to set-up new space, clear out office if it's going to be shared
 - Need to have several meetings to go over Covid guidelines.
 - Extra time to relocate my teaching space to the building, get set-up and alter programming as needed.
 - Emotional/Mental Impacts:
 - If coming into the building is meant to reduce isolation, I am afraid it would increase mine, at this time. Due to family risk I will feel obligated to stay in my provided virtual teaching space for most of the day. I will be in a small room with my computer for most of the day.
 - How to approach the health concern for an at risk family member.
 - The well-thought-out logistical plan for housing us all in a socially distant way, and also protects instruction, planning, and prep.
 - A better way to communicate with teachers at home if I'll be subbing in their classrooms
 - Consideration for staff with kids
 - Information sessions around COVID and schools
 - Lay-out of who is where in building

Decision Point: What changes do we need to make to how we manage school in January (as a response to the Covid19 pandemic)?

Impact Assessment Completed By: Staff of City Garden during November 20 PD.

Option 1: Majority in School

A. Stakeholder Impacts

- Who are the stakeholders impacted by this decision?
 - Students, staff, parents and guardians, the general community.
- What are some of the most significant implications (benefits / burdens) of social identities (EX: race, gender, sexual orientation, class, ability, etc.) in this particular decision?
 - For parents that have to work, children will receive the support that they need
 - Less screen time for the students would benefit all
 - Being in school benefits families that do not have means/access to stay online all the time.
- What are some of the most significant impacts (benefits / burdens) on different roles in this particular decision?
 - Teachers will carry the greatest burden
 - It would be more challenging to manage more students.
 - There is a lot of time spent cleaning
 - Guardians/Parents would have most significant benefit, it is difficult for many to deliver instruction at home.
 - There is greater risk of exposure of Covid19 to staff and students
 - There is fear created to hear about various school exposures
 - If a staff member is exposed, it would disrupt the staffing structure
 - Financially it is a big burden to open with less staff in the building
- What factors may be producing and perpetuating inequities associated with this issue?
- What positive impacts on equity and inclusion, if any, could result from this proposal?
 - Benefit for many families that work, etc.
 - More students can be serviced on site, leading to greater attendance/retention of student body-securing funding for future years.

B. Financial Impacts

- What are the financial impacts on the school as a whole?
 - Families with younger children having to make decisions about where their children attend school if the program is different per level.
 - Cannot add additional staffing, fear of losing staff.
 - Cost of doing in person well while continuing to support virtual students seems challenging.
 - Cost of labor to move items from storage, cost of additional materials.
 - Hard to implement current model, how would we accomplish bringing more students with current staffing and resources.
- What is required to implement this decision?
 - Enough funding secured to complete the year and prepare for the next.

- How is success of implementation measured?
 - Surveys for feedback
- In regard to implementation, which stakeholders are more burdened and which stakeholders will have less work?
 - Administrative staff holding more responsibility during this time - operational and building needs, staffing needs, all serving multiple roles and stretched. Not sustainable for much longer.
- If the decision were to be reversed/adapted, what would the implications be for CG? Who is/isn't burdened?
 - With funding secured this year we have more flexibility.
 - Board and Admin burdened more if changes occur.

C. Implementation Ideas/Feedback/Questions

- What are some options for how CG can address these impacts?
 - Could parents come and step in a bigger way? Could people who have formed pods help us?
 - Need more information on resource pool.
- In claiming and living into City Garden's value of abundance, how might financial needs be met from currently unconsidered places and in currently unconsidered ways?
 - Find out if current funding can be reallocated to areas of need. What funding could be lost?
- Other Questions:
 - How can we provide social interactions safely?
 - How can we address staff child care needs
 - Would it be primarily technology based instruction or materials based instruction?
 - Would there be an A/B schedule ?
 - How would Guides and Teachers manage virtual and hybrid?
 - We would need to be same page instructionally so that kids have access to the curriculum
 - If kids are on A/B schedule what would Teachers kids do?
 - As a PE Teacher would my role be a side note as a support for the classroom or would I be able to teach my content?
 - What if the two or four weeks into the process we have to change to all in to virtual? It causes a disruption.

Option 2: Hybrid

A. Stakeholder Impacts

- Who are the stakeholders impacted by this decision?
 - The students, parents, staff (anyone who would be in the building)
- What are some of the most significant implications (benefits / burdens) of social identities (EX: race, gender, sexual orientation, class, ability, etc.) in this particular decision?
 - Benefit:
 - Our tier 3 students/vulnerable students getting their needs met
 - Meals

- Provides a safe place
 - Having someone there to supervise the classes
 - Easier to contact trace any potential outbreak because of smaller model
 - Staff have the choice in being in the building or teaching virtually
- Burdens
 - Making sure staff in the building gets breaks
 - Staffing when people are sick, quarantining, etc.
 - The limits in the amount of students that can be in the building due to staff limitations
 - Consistency on who is in the building and being on the same page with teaching staff on what students are supposed to be doing
 - Staff choosing to be in the building or being virtual
- What are some of the most significant impacts (benefits / burdens) on different roles in this particular decision?
 - David (IT, Staffer, Finance, HR, COVID person); pros/cons
 - Crystal/Sharmouel working more on staffing, managing schedule, etc. (challenging when staff turnover due to change)
 - Tiffany- COVID contact Tracer
 - Deb Fox- IT
- What factors may be producing and perpetuating inequities associated with this issue?
 - Free/Reduced Lunch
 - Staffing (have enough to accommodate all the students with needs we have)
 - Students who are not in the building and whose parents aren't home
 - Materials delay in getting to students for online instruction
 - Internet access
 - Mental Health/Social Emotional considerations
- What positive impacts on equity and inclusion, if any, could result from this proposal?
 - Fab Friday
 - Teachers having "hang out" zooms
 - Kumon organizing
 - PAC setting up small, safe social gatherings
 - Other sources from SLU that can be leveraged/volunteers
 - Coverage board
 - A way to coordinate parents to make their own "learning pods" like car-pooling- make it more formal that the school helps facilitate

B. Financial Impacts

- What are the financial impacts on the school as a whole?
 - Technology
 - Staffing /salaries
 - Additional materials costs for remote learning
 - Preschool tuition revenue
- What is required to implement this decision? How is success of implementation measured?

- If Hybrid means what we're already doing, can continue as is
- Tech resources very important
- Additional staff hours, including new hires, additional hours of current staff
- Measuring success is very difficult to assess; surveys can be overwhelming, value personal check-ins
- In regard to implementation, which stakeholders are more burdened and which stakeholders will have less work?
 - Workload significantly greater for all
 - Students are overwhelmed, socially, emotionally - difficult to learn in these emotional states
 - In some ways, lessons have been fewer to ensure students grasp concept due to remote way of teaching
 - Parents/guardians challenged to help students online
- If the decision were to be reversed/adapted, what would the implications be for CG? Who is/isn't burdened?
 - If all in-person, fewer staffing issues and more connection w/ students
 - If all in-person, safety concerns; how to adhere to social distanced - even if fewer students
 - UE, if all in-person, feel they may have to reinvent the wheel again
 - Long-term adaptation needs
 - UE currently only has 2 Lead Guides
 - If all 100% remote - no tuition from preschool; K-8, what roles may change; negatively impact all SPED activity

C. Implementation Ideas/Feedback/Questions

- What are some options for how CG can address these impacts?
 - Hybrid Cheat Sheet for roles and responsibilities
 - Rotation schedule of staff and students
 - Increase the baseline capacity of students who are in each pod 5fg
 - Limit to amount of people in the building
 - Have a plan B
 - Do more personal check-ins with staff, from admin and even among staff. Having weekly mini-staff meetings.
 - Emotional needs of students; online gatherings (more time on staff); JH doing community lunches for classes
- Other Questions:
 - How are the most vulnerable students chosen?
 - Suggestion to have a more formalized process on who attends in person.
 - Is there a way we can rotate the students who come into the building?
 - What if the staff rotated?
 - Same teachers with same students
 - What does Training look like in preparation for implementing this model?

- Appears to have some confusion with participation w/ Fab Fridays - could it be mandatory to attend 1 per semester? Yet would this force additional burden on students/family?

Option 3: 100% Virtual

A. Stakeholder Impacts

- Who are the stakeholders impacted by this decision?
 - Parents/Staff/Students/Ancillary Staff/
- What are some of the most significant implications (benefits / burdens) of social identities (EX: race, gender, sexual orientation, class, ability, etc.) in this particular decision?
 - Functioning computers in an effective manner/devices provided there are still issues with hotspots/multiple people in the household
 - parents may lack training on zoom.
 - Parents are paying up to 800 per week in PODS Google classroom etc, benefits/successful guides provided schedules and links to help organize, timers/alarms/no supervision
- What are some of the most significant impacts (benefits / burdens) on different roles in this particular decision?
 - Loss associated with students leaving because not having an in person option.
 - Students in the building have multiple academic needs /services and challenges providing service online very well.
 - Social and Emotional on students with lack of social interaction via virtual.
- What factors may be producing and perpetuating inequities associated with this issue?
 - Families of color have a very different perspective of our white families, Parents of color are satisfied and not comfortable.
 - Low responses from parents of color which does not give a clear picture of how things are going for them as a whole.
 - Parents may be focused on higher needs.
 - Need to ensure more participation to get accurate understanding. Students of color appear to be inconsistent attending/staying on zoom and submitting completed work.
- What positive impacts on equity and inclusion, if any, could result from this proposal?
 - 100% will not meet the needs of all services, provide opportunities for students to still be able to access support.

B. Financial Impacts

- What are the financial impacts on the school as a whole?
 - The loss of revenue from the Primary program would be a huge financial impact which could lead to lay-offs.
 - A positive to this would be less building supplies.
 - The possibility of losing more students and the revenue tied to this.
- What is required to implement this decision? How is success of implementation measured?

- More technology support with both more need for wifi connection and need for more IT support.
- More student engagement needed, especially social emotional needs would need to be beefed up. Student-student, parent-parent, teacher-student, teacher-parent and staff-staff. The exhaustion of schooling on Zoom for all parties is very real and worrisome.
- In regard to implementation, which stakeholders are more burdened and which stakeholders will have less work?
 - More Burdened:
 - Parents struggling in very real ways with all aspects
 - Montessori is not a pedagogy that can translate well to online learning
 - Students social emotional needs are not being met being at home
 - Zoom fatigue
 - **Less** burdened:
 - Staff and students that have health needs.
 - The effort to keep the building open is a big task so not having it open would place our efforts in other areas. The comfort and emotional benefits of working from home.
- If the decision were to be reversed/adapted, what would the implications be for CG? Who is/isn't burdened?

C. Implementation Ideas/Feedback/Questions

- What are some options for how CG can address these impacts?
 - Utilizing Assistant Guides to improve overall communication with parents.
 - Using text, phone blast vs email
 - Hotline students and parents to call with technical issues/ general questions or concerns
 - Having student of color to create pods
 - Utilizing Ancillary Staff
 - Need home visits
 - Monitoring students access on computers virtually
 - Call to community spaces, ie churches, community spaces and use same model in the building
 - Additional people to hold zoom space for students to work in. (Redirection and Support)
 - Panorama emotional survey
 - Need PD on how to help students social emotionally
 - Staff need more time to have meaningful fun times. Focusing on community building during PD
 - Friday clubs are going well.
 - Social Zooms
 - Moving some job duties around to accommodate 100% virtual