



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Contact: Karen Rudolph
254-215-2081 (office)
870-403-6116 (mobile)
karen.rudolph@bisd.net

TRUSTEES DISCUSS RESPONSIVE PLANNING FOR UPCOMING SCHOOL YEAR

Superintendent: Flexibility, agility crucial for success during fluid COVID-19 situation

BELTON, TX — Belton ISD Board of Trustees members met on Wednesday to discuss ongoing planning efforts on how schools can open for instruction safely in August. The discussion was an important step in a process that began in May with a community survey and has involved extensive work by a task force of leaders from across the district.

“Our goal was to create an agile and flexible plan with exceptional student learning experiences being the constant for the 2020-2021 school year,” said Superintendent Matt Smith. “The pillars of our planning process are collaboration and feedback. We believe that bringing together the great minds to sketch out ideas, then running them through our stakeholders, will ultimately lead to the best plans.”

The planning team has been tasked with preparing for multiple scenarios the district is likely to face in the coming months, Smith said.

“With the fluidity of the COVID-19 situation, our plans can’t just be for what we know today,” he said. “There are a lot of different variables, and our job is to plan for all of them. So we’re not just planning for August 19. We’re planning for the entire year.”

Under current published guidance from the Texas Education Agency, school districts must offer parents a choice between at-school and at-home learning options for the new school year. TEA is also currently requiring that at-school learning be available five days a week with an option to phase in to reopening facilities over three weeks.

Smith said that the district is planning for scenarios where students may be in school with varied levels of safety precautions and situations including intermittent absences for illness, a closure, or even a scenario where schedules are adjusted to address public health needs for limiting the number of students on a campus at any given time.

“Our hope is to have uninterrupted learning experiences for kids no matter what their learning environment is,” Smith said. “That is a tall task, as you can see from this presentation tonight, but that is what we’re trying to create because we know that our kids deserve learning to continue.”

Leaders discussed how the district's approach to teaching and learning for the new school year will be improved from the model implemented in spring 2020. Exceptional learning plans under development include:

- Incorporating a blend of asynchronous and synchronous modalities or tools at all grade levels
- Daily schedules for student engagement opportunities
- Providing feedback and communication from teachers
- Standardized grading expectations across learning environments

The Board acted in June to ensure the district will have enough Chromebooks available for all students in grades 2-12. Kindergarteners and first grade students will have access to iPads. In addition, the district will implement various learning management platforms to help make the transition between at-school and at-home learning more seamless.

“This commitment to technology is what’s going to make all this possible,” said Mike Morgan, assistant superintendent of student services. “We’re thankful for you guys that we got ahead of the wave and got some of these purchases made before the crunch.”

Deanna Lovesmith, assistant superintendent for teaching and learning, said 736 teachers have attended training so far this summer to learn how to utilize technology platforms to deliver instruction.

“We have exceptional teachers who are doing amazing things,” Lovesmith said. “They have been doing amazing things before COVID and are going to continue to do that. They are committed to making learning exceptional for our students moving forward.”

District leaders also acknowledged that parents will need to be shown how to use the technology and discussed plans to create training videos.

To address safety for students and staff on campuses and within Belton ISD facilities, leaders discussed the wide range of prevention and mitigation efforts planned for next year. Those include:

- Additional cleaning and sanitization efforts across all facilities and buses
- Increasing supplies of hand sanitizer and portable dispensers available
- Replacing water fountains with water fill stations
- Establishing procedures for handling ‘close contact’ and contract tracing
- Requiring face coverings for students and staff who are able to wear them
- Training on and expectations for self-screening practices
- Protocols for providing transportation and school meals

Parents and staff should watch for surveys that will be emailed Thursday as the district seeks to collect feedback from those stakeholders as the planning process continues. A new response plan website launched by the district at <https://www.bisd.net/responseplan> will house the latest details about plans for the 2020-2021 school year.

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