Having the Reopen Conversation

Purpose:

OFT has developed this document to facilitate conversations between locals and their administration as they work collaboratively to determine the best course of action as they plan to return to school. This is specifically for union leaders to review to prepare to meet with administration rather than to share with them. Each local circumstance is different, so there are not recommendations as to what to do, rather questions posed to help make the decisions needed to return to educating students. This document contains some questions dealing with health and safety, but focuses more on academic needs. The Center for Disease Control (CDC), the state of Ohio and other organizations have released guidance to assure schools are healthy and safe environments. The primary focus of this document is on setting the proper conditions for teaching and learning for the whole child.

To determine the answers to the questions posed, there must be a set of foundational principles that guide decisions to create an educationally and emotionally sound environment for children. This document aligns to the areas found in the Ohio Department of Education's Reset/Restart document distributed to give guidance to local districts as they reopen.

The first section of this document outlines OFT's foundational principles.

Foundational Principles

OFT is committed to supporting our members in creating an environment to ensure our students have the greatest opportunity to receive a well-rounded education that strengthens the whole child. The following are what guide us in making decisions:

- A safe and healthy environment for students, staff, and the community
  must be maintained.
- Face to face instruction is the most effective form of instruction.
- Collaborative decision making is a requirement of the process.
- Decisions should be based on data and reliable information.
- Teachers/educators should make the essential decisions in regard to instruction.
- Flexibility is key in how to manage the variety of ways to deliver instruction.
- There should be reasonable, attainable expectations for teachers of students.
- There must be a work-life balance for students, staff, and families.
- Two-way communication between school and home is essential to build and maintain relationships with students and families.
- To assure all students have the opportunity to obtain a high quality education, the issue of equity must be addressed.

In the successive sections OFT offers questions to ask in determining the decisions which need to be made.

Collaborative Decision Making

In determining how to create a collaborative environment, the following questions need to be addressed:

- What opportunities do we need to create for members to participate in the conceptualizing and planning for the 2020-21 school year?
- How can we develop a meaningful and comprehensive professional development plan for staff at all levels?
- How do we assure the collective bargaining agreement is respected and followedand/or what temporary modifications need to be collectively bargained to adapt to the current situation?
- What is the proper amount of time to provide to make good decisions?
- Who are the collaborators? How do we involve the appropriate people for the decisions that need to be made? (There may need to be different subgroups to deal with specific issues.)
- How do we assure the union chooses the representatives from the staff to make decisions?
- How do we involve local boards of health in helping to make the decisions and provide good information and data?

Teaching and Learning Environment

- How do we plan and implement the different configurations of instruction?
  - How will our special area staff teach their standards in a distance/hybrid teaching environment?
  - How will services be provided and delivered to meet the needs of all students?
  - How do we provide students with the proper materials for their instruction, especially in a virtual environment?
  - What provisions will be made to provide time before beginning the school year for educators to work together to collaborate to prepare to serve the educational needs of all students?
- What is the proper amount of planning time for staff to design lessons and/or to grade and provide feedback for lessons for whatever model of instruction is in place? Will it require additional time than is provided in the Ohio Operating Standards? When will the time be provided?
- How do we assure teachers and paras have collaborative planning time?
- How do we plan for more support for immunocompromised and medically fragile students?

Staffing for Success

- How do we handle situations in which initial staffing may become inadequate?
    - How do we assure we make use of the staff we have before outsourcing work? (We should do all we can to avoid outsourcing.)
    - How can staff be repurposed? How can we use staff flexibly given licensure?
    - How do we assure the proper training is provided when staff are repurposed?

How do we increase the number of school nurses available to deal with sick students and staff?

How do we provide sick leave for Covid-19 related illness that is outside the CBA sick leave?

How do we provide options to vulnerable staff or staff with vulnerable family members?

How do we vet privatizers and academic "resources" that may be considered to take the place of current staff and be cost saving?

Assessments – Formative/Summative

- How do we grade work that is done online or at home with fidelity?
    - Is the weighting for in school learning/assessment different from remote learning assessments and work?
    - What are the technological limitations to administering assessments?

How do we determine what needs to be assessed?

How do we provide professional development in assessment literacy?

How do we adjust terms and quarters to accommodate successful learning?

How do we assess students' current levels of learning ?

Standards/Curriculum/Expectations

- How do we prioritize core concepts in each content area which are reasonable for distance/hybrid learning?
- How do we prioritize critical prerequisite skills and identify gaps?
- What is a reasonable expectation to balance the accessing of learning at a device vs. engagement in performing tasks?
- How do we provide the time for vertical conversations with grade levels?
- How much work should be assigned in a remote learning environment?
- How will assignments be coordinated among teachers so that students are not being overloaded?

- What considerations need to be given to equity concerns when making grading decisions? (do all students have the same access to resources such as devices, internet access, etc. If not, should that impact how grading decisions are made?)

Student Engagement

- How do we provide for greater student engagement, inquiry, and deeper learning?
- How do we assure students respond to the feedback they are getting on assignments?
- What will the role of extracurricular activities be?
- How do we assure students are provided the opportunity to take special area classes?
- How do we address social emotional needs of students?
  - How do we create opportunities for the students to interact with each other?
  - What is the impact of stress/trauma on the student's ability to engage and how do we add the supports they need to assure engagement?

  How do we respond when students/families are not engaging?

Family/Community Engagement

- How do we keep families involved when time in the building may be limited or nonexistent?
- What is a sensible communication plan for families?
- What supports are we providing to families?
- How do we work together with local childcare providers?
- How do we involve local businesses/resources in supporting schools?
- How do we deal with families who do not want to follow the requirements?

Harnessing and Effective Use of Resources

- Who is responsible for developing and "warehousing" a list of available community resources?
  - How do we identify community resources or agencies available for support?

  What is the role of Community Learning Centers and how do we establish this model locally?

  How do we partner with Educational Service Centers when they are available to a district?

  How do we use our internal resources effectively? {(ie) school counselors, nurses, paras}

Technology – Its Role and Considerations for Use

- Will there be additional supports available for troubleshooting with families who have device or connection issues; will there be a tech help hotline for families to call with issues?

- Will the state or district provide hotspots for staff and students who do not currently have adequate wireless access as well as providing devices for students to take home to complete online instruction?
- How do we assure educators have a clear understanding of the privacy issues in remote learning as well as what is appropriate and inappropriate when providing remote learning?
- How will the decision be made as to which platforms are being used in the district?

Readiness to Learn; Readiness to Teach

- What professional development opportunities exist to prepare teachers for the distance/hybrid model of teaching?
- What tutorials/training do students and parents need to access distance/hybrid education?
- What supports will be provided to teachers new to the profession within or outside of their Residency?

Vulnerable Students and Staff

- What provisions do we need to make to tutor children who are immunocompromised and cannot come to school for face to face instruction?
- What provisions do we need for staff who are caregivers to a person who is immunosuppressed?
- How should districts identify and accommodate workers who are at higher risk for severe illness from contracting Covid-19? This should include those over 60 and/or with known underlying conditions, including pregnancy?
- What flexibilities are available to vulnerable staff?

Operational/Health and Safety

- How do we set up a system of vetting to assure any resources are proven and valid?

  - For example: Anxiety over the spread of Covid-19 has left districts vulnerable to unscrupulous vendors who are willing to sell institutions virus mitigation systems that have not been clinically proven to work or can pose a very serious health hazard.

  How do we establish isolation rooms and guidelines?

  What are the considerations for safety and health when reopening a building that has been shut down for a period of time? (ie, stagnant water issues, mold, potential Legionnaires disease sources)

  How do we manage passing time?

  How do we provide face shields for deaf and young students?

What are the specific instructions around bringing outside materials to school and storing such materials?

How do we determine the proper decisions when health and safety overlap instructional decisions?

How do we use the recommendations of the CDC and local health departments to make decisions?

Who will handle screening of students or staff who have been ill and need to return to the classroom? Who does contact tracing?

How do we establish administration guidelines and scenarios for issues that arise round the recurrence of a case of Covid-19? What is required in writing to readmit kids?

What measures will be put into place to protect families from truancy reports if they have students who are out due to Covid-19 symptoms, fever, positive testing, etc.