

Recommendation for Transparent MOA Public Health Review of ASD Plans to Reconvene Close Contact Groups in Schools During a Pandemic

MEMO

TO: Rogers Park Community Council

THRU: Rogers Park Community Council Executive Board

FROM: Mark Foster

RE: Proposed RPCC Resolution in Support of a Transparent, Professional Municipal Public Health Review of ASD Plans to Reconvene Close Contact Groups in School Buildings in November and January

DATE: November 3, 2020 [with data update scheduled for November 9]

Summary

Recommend adoption of the RPCC Resolution in Support of a Transparent Professional MOA Public Health Review of ASD Plans to Reconvene Close Contacts with Anchorage School Buildings.

While the Superintendent has indicated and the Public Health Department has confirmed that the District conferred with the public health department prior to the October issuance of the school district plan to reconvene teachers and staff and a limited pool of students (SPED, preK - 2 grade) in November-December, the details involved in that consultation remain opaque to the public.

The very high and increasing levels of COVID-19 community spread in Anchorage are sobering. The combination of public health initiatives, including public messaging in favor of hand washing, masking and maintaining physical distance, in combination with contact tracing, testing and isolation systems that have been deployed to help manage the disease have failed to contain, let alone suppress the pandemic. Anchorage and the Mat-Su are facing the prospect of shortages of staffed ICU beds.

It is well past time for the MOA public health department to share their detailed professional assessment of why, despite widespread independent professional public health advice that schools should refrain from opening until disease levels are under control¹, the school district should proceed with its plans for reconvening in November-December and January in light of current conditions.

Prudent Public Health, Education, Economic and Social Value Approach to Pandemic Math

The prudent problem to focus on to solve is how to reduce the community transmission of the disease in order to improve our collective public health which in turn will enable safe reconvening of education, economic and social activities.

The CEO of Alaska Regional Hospital recently cut through the noise to identify the root cause of the community challenge, individuals and groups who feel entitled to endanger themselves, their family and friends and their community – by continuing to ignore basic personal hygiene advice.

¹ See for example The Lancet COVID-19 Commission Statement, Volume 396, Number 10257, pages 1045-1128, October 10-16, 2020, and the Harvard Global Health Institute Path to Zero & Schools: Achieving Pandemic Resilient Teaching and Learning Spaces, **guidance to help schools and districts devise plans based on the size of the outbreak in the local community.**

Recommendation for Transparent MOA Public Health Review of ASD Plans to Reconvene Close Contact Groups in Schools During a Pandemic

As it turns out, addressing this challenge is an area where hospital systems have considerable experience and expertise within their professional teams.

Hospital acquired infections in the 2000's were sufficiently worrisome across the public health community that they became an issue within the Affordable Care Act.

In response, the hospital sector brought together diverse teams of stakeholders to identify the root causes of why people within their facilities were acquiring diseases and frequently found the root cause was the failure of people within their facility to *consistently follow* basic hygiene practices, including hand washing.

Hospitals across our state face a wide range of community behavior and are on the front line. They have knowledge about not only "what should we be doing", but also "how do we ensure improved compliance with basic hygiene to reduce infections".

I would like to encourage the Mayor to continue to gather our public health professionals to collaborate on how we can effectively reduce the incidence of COVID-19 across Southcentral and provide a safe resilient level of public health protection that will enable us to safely reconvene our schools, our businesses and a robust winter social life.

cc: Mayor Quinn-Davidson, Anchorage Assembly, Superintendent Bishop, Anchorage School Board

Appendices:

1. Summary Table: COVID-19 Comparative Data and Risk Thresholds

Recommendation for Transparent MOA Public Health Review of ASD Plans to Reconvene Close Contact Groups in Schools During a Pandemic

Country / Community / Standard	New cases per million per day	New deaths per million per day	Tests per positive test / Test positivity rate
<i>Illustrative public health performance benchmarks</i>			
New Zealand	0.68	0.00	1413 / 0.07%
Republic of Korea	2.17	0.03	102.5 / 0.98%
Finland	37.21	0.13	68.8 / 1.45%
Norway	61.43	0.08	61.9 / 1.62%
Canada	78.49	0.88	30.1 / 3.32%
LANCET COVID-19 Commission Guidance	100		
Harvard Global Health Institute Risk Thresholds for Elementary Grade School Building Re-openings	200		5%
Boston Threshold			20 / 5%
Prior Anchorage Threshold (August)	100		
Current ASD Thresholds	ASD Superintendent October Announcement – the district is using a “holistic” assessment		
Current Anchorage Conditions (2 Nov 2020)	557.5	~3	11 / 9%

Sources: LANCET COVID-19 Commission Statement (October 10-15 Issue, Volume 396, Number 10257, page 1108, Our World in Data (November 2, 2020), COVID Tracking Project (November 2, 2020), Harvard Global Health Institute Path to Zero & Schools: Achieving Pandemic Resilient Teaching and Learning Spaces, State of Alaska Daily COVID-19 Updates (November 2, 2020), State of Alaska COVID-19 Dashboard Data (November 2, 2020), Boston Globe (cite),