

BRIAN EWERT'S STATEMENT TO THE BOARD OF EDUCATION, FEB. 25, 2021

During last week's workshop regarding the return to full time in person learning for MS and HS students March 15, a question was asked about the input I had received prior to my making this decision. I want to talk just a little bit more about that tonight.

Those who know me well... know that I place a high value on collaboration... but I stated last week that this full return to school was not a collaborative decision. As the superintendent, I made this decision and I stand by my decision. I firmly believe we can fully open and operate our middle and high schools safely... and I know that ultimately, I will be held accountable for my decision. But I want to be clear that while I made the decision, it certainly was not made in a vacuum; I made this decision with nearly a year's worth of data monitoring, including ongoing feedback from parents, staff, students, and community members, and our community and public health partners.

We've had to make a lot of decisions about school since last March, and people have not been shy about sharing their opinions about those decisions every step of the way.

Some have accused me of being politically left or politically right or uncaring or pandering to this group or that group in my decision-making because they haven't agreed with the decisions that have been made this year. It hurts to hear that. Make no mistake: nothing could be further from the truth. Every decision I've made has been given careful deliberation, thoughtful discussion, and the greatest care regarding how it will affect children in LPS.

We hear from those on every side of every issue regarding every decision: Whether or not we should have gone fully remote last spring. Whether or not we should have the TOPS program and how much money should be spent on it. Whether or not we should be fully remote, in a hybrid model, or fully in-person at any point in time. This has been a continuous point of division since last March from many stakeholder groups. Whether or not we should have delayed the start of school last August. Whether or not we should be looking at community data to inform our decisions. Whether or not we should have gone fully remote in November and whether or not we should have done so sooner. Whether or not we should have reopened in January. Whether or not students should be participating in activities and athletics.

These are all valid opinions expressed by caring people. There are no right or wrong answers. There is no precedent... as I said at the last meeting, this is a wicked problem. And, there is absolutely no agreement on any of these issues among any groups of stakeholders: employees, students, parents, or community members. Having said that, there remains ONE issue that this community continues to have agreement on: doing what is in the best interests of the students we serve. That is my north star. So, while not everyone will agree with my decision, I can assure you that this decision and all of my decisions are steeped in concern, the welfare, and in the best interest of LPS students.

The data, the research, and the overwhelming opinions expressed by so many parents and staff is that our community's children need to be back in school as much as possible. They need each other. They need to come back to school full-time not just for their learning but also for their social and emotional well-being. The data and the research also suggest we can now safely bring all middle and high school students back to school every day.

As I expressed in my letter to the community last Friday, the availability of vaccines to our employees is a huge help. Our overlapping health strategies--particularly mask-wearing--continue to greatly minimize COVID spread in schools. Since last March, there have been only 9 cases of COVID in our schools to come out of those who were quarantined. ONLY 9.

Other districts in the metro area are making similar plans to bring all students back to school in the coming weeks as well... many of those announcements were made this week and more announcements will be made next week.

It is true that we have a long tradition and place a high value on collaborative decision-making in LPS. And I wholeheartedly share that value. But there are rare occasions when Boards of Education and superintendents have to take all of the information we have at our disposal and make the best decisions we can for kids, knowing not everyone will agree.

The COVID pandemic has been the greatest example of this any of us have ever experienced. And while the decision to fully reopen MS's and HS's on March 15 was an intention command decision, the LPS administrative team and I stand ready to troubleshoot, problem solve, and collaborate around any issues that emerge during this full restart. I believe we can meet these challenges and solve any problems just as we always do.

I want to take a moment to stress again how impressive our teachers, principals, and all those who support their work have been throughout this pandemic. This community has asked a great deal of them, and they have come through for our students. We need to continue to support our kids and our teachers in the weeks and months ahead. I also want to thank our community members for their continued support. Thank you for continuing to wear masks and avoid large gatherings and for continuing to follow our schools' health and safety protocols. This is a team effort, and we wouldn't have been able to maintain in-person learning models more than any other large school district in the Denver metro area without our community's support!