

# **D67 APT Exec Board Liaison Questions for Superintendent Simeck February 2021**

## **COVID-19 AND RELATED ISSUES**

1.) MAP scores and other testing metrics have not been impressive this year. What are the plans to acknowledge this to the community and help bridge the gap to keep our kids moving forward? Can we have more summer school options this year?

- District 67 2020 student assessments were canceled because of the coronavirus.
- At the January District 67 Board of Education meeting, Dr. Jeff McHugh, the district's Director of Teaching and Learning, provided a District 67 assessment update to the community.
- He presented data from the Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) test, which District 67 students in grades 2-8 took remotely in December.
- District 67 administers the MAP test each winter and spring to measure student growth in reading and math.
- Dr. McHugh presented graphs showing that the average District 67 student performs at approximately the 75% percentile nationally in both reading and math, "similarly to how they have in the past."
- Dr. McHugh also shared graphs comparing the percentages of District 67 students who met the MAP benchmark this winter compared to last.
- He explained that District 67 students performed comparably in reading both years, but math achievement was lower this winter, which mirrors the national trend of greater learning loss in math than reading.
- Teachers have and will continue to use data to change instruction using MAP results to make adjustments that support individual students' needs.

- District 67 is beginning to plan for a more robust summer school program focused building targeted academic skills.

2.) As we continue to increase mitigation efforts (vaccine, testing, physical distancing, screening. etc.) could we potentially shorten the lunch break and cut down the SEL homeroom time to have another 30 mins added to in person learning to incorporate in-person math on a daily basis at DPM? The decreased minutes devoted to the core subjects this year is very concerning.

- Our District 67 admin team is very aware of this concern and doing everything they can to find ways to offer enrichment.
- It comes down to teacher plan time.
- Due to the fact that teachers need to teach AM and PM cohorts, teachers are close to their minimum contractual plan time.
- Adding more daily time for math likely wouldn't even be a possibility for one cohort, let alone both AM and PM groups.
- If you have a specific concern about your student, please reach out directly to their teacher or principal.

3.) Is the district currently making learning plans based on likely Covid scenarios for next Fall? What will next year look like? Will it be full day? It would be nice to know before the end of the year if it will be full day – even if it's full day with masks on. Will AVA still be offered?

- I anticipate next fall that District 67 students will be in-person, every day. All in. We are working toward that goal.
- Masks will almost certainly be required.
- Not sure what our distancing requirements will be.
- Will depend on the State Board of Ed and Health Department.
- Not completely clear yet about online learning options next year.
- We are already planning for how we will bring students back full time and devoted most of our January All-Admin meeting to brainstorming and troubleshooting how that could work, contingent upon distancing.

4.) Has the district considered sending out a survey asking about spring break travel plans? From what I am hearing, a large majority are planning to travel. If so, perhaps the week after break should be virtual. This would allow teachers/parents to still travel and have a week to quarantine and encourage honesty. People should be required to self-certify (through screener) they are home in LF a week before (Monday March 29). Then gateway testing could be offered/mandated the Thurs/Fri before in-person school begins. This would avoid many headaches for teachers/administrators after spring break.

- Yes, we have considered a survey.
- We are not currently planning to begin remotely following Spring Break.
- Our experience has shown that if we start in remote for one or two weeks, many families will simply extend their breaks by one or two weeks.
- We will rely on families to use the honor system, following travel and quarantine guidance as provided by the Lake County Health Department. (See page 20 of [health and Safety protocols located on The Map.](#))
- If staff and students have travelled and followed health and safety protocols including the 3Ws, then our hope would be that they would use the screener, participate in voluntary testing, and return to hybrid in-person learning as appropriate.
- Voluntary testing will continue to be offered for District 67 students and staff following break and for the remainder of the school year.

5.) Can AVA student iPads come with Wi-Fi or can mobile hotspots be made available to AVA students next year so when we have Wi-Fi outages or power outages, students can continue attending classes uninterrupted or without teachers marking them as an unexcused absence? Or can mobile hotspots be made available at the IRC or school libraries to check out in case of Wi-Fi / power outage? Our Lake Forest Public Library doesn't offer mobile hotspots to borrow even though all the other towns seem to provide this to their local residents including highland park library and Deerfield.

- Our Chief Technology Officer Jordan Salus is aware of this constructive feedback.
- Jordan's team has explored options. iPads with Cellular backups would not be a cost effective option -- it would run \$40 per student per month for very low usage.
- The Technology Department has hotspots on hand at DPM for loan; they can be contacted at studenttechhelp67@lfschools.net
- The Tech team centralizes "loaner" hotspots at DPM due to the variability of need on a day-to-day basis.

6.) It's now been 10 months since COVID hit. What are some of your main takeaways from this experience?

1. Our kids, their families, and teachers have all done a phenomenal job of adapting.
2. We want to get our students to safely return to fully in-person learning. Being in school is incredibly important to kids' well-being.
3. I have often heard it said that innovation thrives in a crisis environment and that has definitely been the case during COVID in our district. The AVA is a good example of that.
4. Another key takeaway is that mitigation efforts work.
5. Our teachers have been and continue to be ready for every challenge.
6. While not perfect, remote options have gone remarkably well.
7. Choice may be with us to stay.
8. Finally, but perhaps most importantly, one more key takeaway is that a few people can have a very big impact on the many. That is the story of COVID.

7.) Please thank the administration for being proactive regarding Covid testing/mitigation efforts. I think if they continue to educate people on the benefits testing can provide, maybe the community will come around to it (teachers feel safer, keeps schools open and Covid out, helps keep community numbers low, and could potentially provide a pathway to full day school). I don't think the community understands what "surveillance" Covid testing really is and how it benefits both our

school and community. Maybe Dr. Morcott could make a short recorded video that explains how it works and why other schools are doing it. People could watch on their own time. Parents also still are worried about false positives.... they need to be told over and over it is 2 positive tests in a row now before needing to quarantine and chance very low with the new test.

- I agree that community education about testing is important and we can always do more.
- And, yes, we cannot communicate enough about our protocols related to false positives. There is a misperception out there regarding testing protocol for false positives that we need to correct.
- If an individual tests positive, Passport Health will administer a second, confirmatory BinaxNOW antigen test. If the individual again tests positive, [a RT-PCR test](#) will be required.

## **Staffing**

8.) We have seemed to be months behind other districts this year-with a reactionary approach... what will we do moving forward to change that to a more proactive approach?

- We have already begun planning for Summer and Fall 2021.
- We dedicated the majority of our recent All-Admin meeting to brainstorming and troubleshooting scenarios for bringing students back full time in the fall.
- I have heard some lament that we are behind. It's just not true.
- I'm on calls with superintendents every week where one superintendent hears that a colleague is doing things they aren't doing and vice versa.
- We were the first in the region (possibly the state) to offer gateway testing.
- Our risk mitigation efforts were as thorough and effective as anyone's anywhere.
- We successfully opened schools without significant issues.
- The AVA is a huge success.
- We've been able to maintain the same schedule and teachers (continuity) throughout the entire year.
- We have accommodated parents' requests to move back and forth.

- Other districts have contacted us and sought advice on how to get started - districts that were remote for the first semester.
- Comparisons to North Shore Cook County schools aren't valid comparisons due to different health department guidance (Cook County versus Lake County).

9.) What is your opinion of the effectiveness of the shared services model? Is there any insight as to why the BOE decided to continue with one superintendent for both D67 and D115?

- I believe the decision to optimize shared services in the near-term makes sense.
- Unwinding it can be done but it is extraordinarily hard.
- We would need to significantly increase administrative staff.
- The prospect of adding a million dollars of administrators, could mean cutting programming for kids. That isn't an attractive prospect.

10.) What is the plan for the additional staff that was brought on for this year during COVID? Will any of them be staying in the district?

- We don't know yet.
- Our staffing is likely to change next year based on plans for in-person learning.
- It is still early to project 2021-2022 staffing plans.

## **Diversity**

11.) Where does the district stand in the formation of the Diversity/Equity/Inclusion work groups that Mr. Simeck mentioned this Fall? Has anything been done to form these groups? Who is leading this process? The LF Anti-Racist Parent Advocacy Group was told that a representative from our group would be invited to join the above work groups. Is this still the case?

- Rebecca Jenkins and the District 67 Admin team are working together on this planning.
- We have established a relationship with equity consulting firm [DeEtta Jones](#).

- We are currently working with the firm to develop a plan for implementation, training, and programming.
- The will be presented to the Board and community during a public Board of Education meeting.
- Part of that plan will include engaging the community in the process and the parent group mentioned in your question will be included.

12.) What is the district doing about the need for its teachers and staff to receive training and professional development on implicit bias and equity training?

- District staff already do annual implicit bias training.
- A regional partnership with other districts through NSSD has been formed and will be moving ahead with a joint approach.

13.) Has the district considered establishing a Director of Diversity and Inclusion? There are current issues, and long-standing issues, regarding race and race hate speech that have not been properly dealt with at the schools. We need a dedicated person to be leading this effort and to be available to parents to consult with.

- It is not in the plans at this time.
- There are significant pros and cons to a position like this.
- For example, many organizations have found that having a position like this shifts responsibility for the work to one person.
- This is not a project, it is a mindset. Diversity and inclusion are everyone's job.
- As our plans roll out, we will make recommendations for how to ensure this work is introduced and adopted in a lasting and meaningful way throughout our district.

## **Miscellaneous**

14.) Once we're past COVID, what do you see as the district's top 3 issues to tackle (or top 3 priorities to focus on)?

- We won't be done with COVID for some time but we will learn to live with it differently - especially as more people are vaccinated.

1. SEL - this is going to be a major, multi-year process for students and staff.
2. Continued facility improvements across remaining areas of the buildings
3. Extending the work of inclusive practices throughout all grades and all aspects of our work.

15.) Are there still plans to renovate the high school?

- Yes.
- The Facilities Master Plan was adopted by the BOE, and plans had to be put on hold in 2020 due to COVID.
- The high school is in need of significant improvements with its physical plant and instructional support through its facilities.
- The Facilities Master Plan will be revisited prior to my departure.

16.) We've heard so much about families leaving the city for Lake Forest. How has this affected enrollment in District 67?

- A five-year surplus of houses disappeared in Lake Forest during COVID.
- We expect to see a leveling off of our enrollment decline due to the numbers of families moving to the area.

17.) As you prepare for the next chapter in your career, what do you see as some of your main accomplishments and/or favorite memories from your time at District 67?

- We have fundamentally changed the instructional model in my time here.
- Kids are the focus of classrooms more than ever.
- We know exactly where students are academically now and monitor that very carefully.
- The focus is personalized on each student individually.
- Our curriculum has no floor and no ceiling; we ensure every student grows.
- Our students have more access than they've ever had to a strong curriculum and an inclusive environment. It's good for students to have other students of all abilities in their classes.



- We have also transformed the district physically - the carpet is gone, the classrooms are bright and beautiful, the libraries have received design awards, the “future-ready” science labs are the ones that our kids deserve
- We’ve hired great people and provided amazing professional development for them.
- The question included favorite memories...I have a lot of them.
- I love seeing students who I knew as first or second graders receive their diploma at the end of high school.
- A more recent and very special memory in the District would have to be my daughter receiving her diploma last year during our drive-thru graduation at the high school.
- That was one for the books.

18.) According to the Illinois Department of Health, educators fall into category 1B for vaccinations. Do you have any news or updates regarding when teachers will start getting vaccinated? Is there a certain percentage of teachers that have to be vaccinated before we can return to a regular, full, in-person school day?

- Our educators are registered on the Lake County Allvax portal
- Some are not waiting for the county and are signing up elsewhere - Jewel-Osco, Mariano, Walgreens, Walmart, etc.
- Designated locations for Lake County vaccine distribution currently include Stevenson High School and Round Lake High School.
- Distribution has been slow but the Federal government recently purchased an additional 200 million doses which should help.
- More in [my vaccination report](#) delivered to the District 67 Board on January 26.

19.) Is the food that is unclaimed from the FDA food pickups donated?

- Our federally funded Tuesday and Thursday meal pickup program at DPM and LFHS has served over 90,000 meals since it began in November.
- There is clearly a need.

- The program is managed by Quest, not just here in Lake Forest but with many other communities, as well.
- While it is a no-questions-asked initiative on our part, there are very stringent guidelines about access to these meals.
- They are intended solely for children 18 years of age and younger. The guidelines go further to place the burden on districts to certify that it believes the meals are ending up where intended.
- Our program rights could be revoked, or the district could be required to repay previous funding received, leaving us with an incredible cost burden.
- Although there are some who believe the meals are wasted if not picked up, that is not accurate.
- Quest manages its supply chain so that unused food is refrigerated and carried over to the next pickup cycle in our district or moved into a neighboring program.
- It is essentially a zero-waste program.
- We are very proud of our affiliation with this program.

(End)