



# Superintendent's Report to the Board (Transcript)

March 9, 2021

Good evening, Directors, and buenas tardes to everyone listening in this evening.

**This has been a dramatic and challenging last few days for the District – and the coming weeks will require us to continue to draw on our strengths as individuals and as an organization.**

**Thank you Chair for your statement at the opening of tonight's meeting and Student Rep Shue for your remark.**

**First, I want to assure the Board and the community that we remain undeterred by the malicious act of arson and property violence last weekend.**

We have cleaned up the destruction, and fortunately, no one was hurt. I want to commend our staff, our security and custodial teams, and Portland Fire & Rescue for their commitment to the safety of our schools and students.

What happened early Saturday morning won't stop us from doing our work, from accomplishing our mission. We'll keep moving forward.

Needing to rise to the occasion has been a constant theme throughout this pandemic.

In a very difficult year, we have never lost sight of what matters, including the importance of racial equity and elevating underrepresented voices in our system -while recognizing that there has been a cost and impact to students and families and our community.

Our students need to be seen and heard in person, for the sake of their learning and for their social, emotional and mental well-being. And importantly, many of our students require in-person specialized instruction and services.

And we also know that all of our efforts at virtual learning were always intended to be temporary.

Now we are being asked to reopen by our Governor.

The details of the governor's executive order, which has not been formally issued yet, are still forthcoming. And how we respond is still taking shape.

Here's what we *do* know:

The plan comes in two phases: K-5 schools will return the week of March 29. Grades 6 through 12 will reopen in mid-April.

The governor's new expectations essentially give us a little more than two weeks to finish finalizing our instructional models and all of the detailed operational plans necessary to safely

welcome students back to school buildings. And really, if you consider spring break, we are now down to **eight business days** to land all of this.

**There is still much to do. But we will be ready. We know it is safe for us to re-open for in-person, or a hybrid, of virtual and in-person learning.**

From the beginning of the pandemic, we've insisted on basing our decisions for re-opening on objective health metrics for schools.

The key metric is the 14-day cumulative case rate, based on the number of positive tests per 100,000 residents in the community.

These rates have shown steady improvement. In fact, the rates recently fell below the threshold for school hybrid and in-person reopening.

The public's confidence is clearly rising as case rates drop. A healthy majority of our families, including our families of color, have indicated they want some form of in-person learning this spring.

So, based on the science, based on the results, we can move forward -- and we will do so carefully.

**I want to share how we've been preparing for this moment.**

We want everyone to feel confident that we've taken the necessary steps to welcome back students and staff to our buildings.

First: Many of our teachers and other student-facing staff have had the opportunity to be vaccinated and have begun that process. Vaccination is the surest possible way to avoid contracting or spreading COVID-19, and it is available to all student-facing employees.

Second: We have begun to address ventilation and air flow issues in our buildings. Wherever possible, we've upgraded HVAC systems at schools, increased ventilation by opening windows, and invested in air purifiers for all learning spaces.

We won't be returning to classrooms set-up in the way we have always been used to, but we will be returning to safe learning spaces that have been adapted to meet our current needs and requirements.

Third, we have **already** re-opened some of our buildings for limited in-person instruction. We have more than 85 schools already up and running with at least a portion of students attending during the day with limited class sizes.

We have opened up school athletics programs, which are operating in a safe manner. By the end of this week, all of our schools will be operating limited in-person programming.

**We have learned a great deal from these initial efforts.** We have made changes to classroom configurations and adjusted protocols. At the same time, we recognize that each school is different and will require different approaches. But the goals are the same: ensure a safe

learning environment and maintain a continuity of learning. That's what our students deserve, our teachers need, and our community continues to support.

Our re-opening measures are still taking shape.

**We** don't have all the specific details quite yet.

But all student-facing staff have access to vaccines.

We have procured and are distributing additional safety equipment and equipment. We have articulated and implemented health & safety protocols.

And we have the guidance from health authorities to inform our plans.

And..... we are **educators**. We know how to support our students and their success. And that's the most important asset we have.

Fundamentally, a thriving school community is about the positive relationships between students, educators, and families.

So I thank everyone in advance for your support, for your continued flexibility, and willingness to adapt to continue meeting the challenge in front of us as we stay student-centered and celebrate a return to school for our children and young adults. This will be a new kind of first day of school, with the kind of natural nervous excitement that comes with being with peers and in new classes.

And it will be important for all of us... and I also appreciate what the earlier speaker described - that we focus on making this the most positive and welcoming return to school experience... for our students.

Staff will be sharing more details and updates related to school re-opening later in the agenda.

And lastly, I also want to alert our audience and community, that If you now go to our district's homepage on-line, you'll notice a new banner "PPS Re Opens"; there you will observe a growing level of transparent communications and details posted there for all things related to our schools re-opening.

Thank you.