

On behalf of the Board of Education, I WOULD LIKE TO THANK EACH OF YOU who took the time to respond. First I would like to apologize for the delay in responding, we wanted to make sure we answered all of your questions with thought and detail. Since there are multiple families represented in these emails there will be one email responding to all. That said here is a response to each of the questions presented to us and the reasoning behind each answer. We know we can't please everyone, but our goal is the best education provided in the safest format.

Please feel free to attend our board meetings, this is uncharted territory for all of us. The best way we can navigate from this point is with open communication. We won't all agree, but it is imperative that we work together for the best of our children.

In response to the questions presented to the Board of Education:

- 1. What criteria was used for the vote for remote learning? Please be specific. Please respond with a copy of the original MGS back to school plan. Was one ever created? We do not see this posted anywhere on MGS website. We have reviewed all surrounding schools and their back to school plan is easily obtainable. (Germantown Hills is a school we should be consistent with and their plan is outstanding and easy to find.)*

The criteria was based on the most recent IDPH guidelines

(<https://www.isbe.net/Documents/IDPH-School-FAQs.pdf>). In particular, the first section titled "Management of Ill Students and Staff" as well as the section on "Contacts to Cases" showed us how unstable and inconsistent the in-person learning environment could become.

Over the course of the last two weeks, we have learned first-hand about the health department guidelines for quarantine/isolation of people that are in direct contact with an individual who has tested positive for COVID-19. The plan that was developed, presented, and approved for a shortened school day no longer seemed a feasible route in light of the contact tracing requirements, which would suddenly prevent a student--and possibly all of their siblings--from attending school. Similarly, any school personnel could potentially be required to quarantine without notice. It is important to note that the quarantine affects all students and adults who were within six feet of a confirmed positive individual, regardless if a mask was being worn. What became evident was with consideration of the size, layout, and range of grades in our building, MGS would struggle to comply with IDPH guidelines in a way that would prevent large numbers of people quarantined if we were to have a positive COVID-19 case. (See "Contacts to Cases" on page 2 of the above link.)

Yes, a plan was created. The plan allowed for all students to be in the building with direct instruction from 8:20 a.m. until 12:20 p.m., followed by an hour of remote learning at home from 1:30 p.m. until 2:30 p.m. Paraprofessionals would work in the afternoon with students that needed to stay, with Latchkey personnel starting at 3:00 p.m. When we surveyed parents about the need for this service, the response indicated more than 200 students would need to stay after school. As we considered the space limitations of our building, along with the restriction of no more than 50 people in a room (regardless of size), this was going to be a problematic situation. Various activities would be planned into the afternoon, ranging from lunch, to academic support, to outdoor activity. For our students who would be returning home at 12:20, a sack lunch, if requested by parents, would be provided under this year's school lunch fee structure. It was our understanding that this was communicated with (and understood by) parents. Until this change, no further questions were presented regarding the plan, or questioning the contents of the plan. Regarding

the Internet posting, while **the plan was communicated with our families**, it should have been posted on our website.

- 2. Was the Board of Education's decision influenced by the teachers union? Please respond with all statistics that were used to analyze the decision making process before the board voted to go to remote learning. Please provide all detailed specifics on the parent survey results and well as the teacher survey results.*

The Board of Education takes the concerns of our students, families, and staff seriously, and understand the tremendous impact this decision has on all stakeholders. That is why this decision was so difficult.

In short, the metric that ultimately changed the plan to all remote learning for the first nine weeks was the quarantine/isolation guidelines required by the IDPH. **The decision was not influenced by the Metamora Elementary Teachers' Association (teachers' union)**. There were a number of parent surveys conducted over the summer. The one to which you are referring had the majority of parents wanting to return to the in-person learning plan, which resulted in our initial plan being approved. There were others who did not want their children to return, which paved the way to offer remote learning for them. Since the COVID outbreak at MGS, there have been additional parents who have made the decision to keep their students at home. The **purpose of the parent survey** in July was issued to determine if enough parents would voluntarily choose remote learning so as to obtain reduced class size to allow for adequate distancing between students in each classroom under the current plan. If not enough volunteered for remote learning, then, an alternative plan was to be considered.

The **results of the parent survey in July** were 3% homeschool, 11% remote learning option and 86% preferred in-person learning. Therefore, adequate distancing was not achievable in classrooms. The **first teacher survey** indicated 75+% were comfortable with the 8:20-12:20 schedule that was presented in July. The **latest teacher survey** had nearly 75% in favor of remote learning (this was *after* they learned how a confirmed positive case impacts students and their families when following the IDPH quarantine guidelines).

- 3. How was this criteria at MGS different from any other area Elementary or High School? As a reminder, according to the Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH) back to school guidelines, the positive Covid-19 cases at the school would have been cleared by the time school had started. What specifically within the IDPH guidelines could MGS not conform to while other surrounding schools are able to?*

The revised criteria for MGS is not different from any other school. With your questions, there were three school district's plans attached; Germantown-Hills, Morton, and Washington 52. We've come to understand that Morton has 40 or more people (staff and students) in quarantine. Washington 52 has now made the decision to move to remote learning "based on the guidelines of the IDPH". The rules state that any contact of 15 minutes or more of a positive COVID case, within a 6 ft. distance, mask or no mask, puts one on a contact-tracing list from the Health Department. While our current cases would have been cleared by the start of school, any additional cases would have resulted in not only one student, but any siblings in the family, and anyone identified through contact tracing to be gone from school for at least ten, if not fourteen, days of quarantine. This could put students and staff in the position of going back and forth from remote to in-person instruction. The logistics of a student, siblings, and others each of them may have come into

contact with would have resulted in a lack of consistency of education and planning for our students, families and teachers. With the guidelines that we were recently presented, we could no longer follow the three to six feet guidance that we had worked into our original plan. The decision was made in the interest of providing the most consistent educational format possible. Again, this was not the original plan or intent of the district. Rather, it was based on a consistent, safe approach to educating our students. Our desire is to have students back in the building by the start of the 2nd Quarter of the school year.

4. *Did the board consider the current Covid-19 risk within the school to school athletes?*

Yes. The decision was based on the IESA/ISBE/IDPH guidelines for athletics (<https://coronavirus.illinois.gov/sfc/servlet.shepherd/document/download/069t000000CyCndAAF?operationContext=S1> and <https://www.iesa.org/temp/IESAAlternativePlan.pdf>). The current sports season is based on all outdoor activity, where the ability to socially distance is much easier than in busses, classrooms, and hallways. As stated, the original plan was to bring the kids back into school. Athletics were one way that the students may be able to maintain some type of normalcy in their lives and social interaction with their peers. The contact tracing and quarantine components of athletic teams is a manageable situation, and games/practices will be cancelled, if need be, according to IDPH/IESA guidelines.

5. *Before you approved to go to remote learning, were you aware of how the virtual learning took place in the spring and the lack of an education our children received? Did you obtain any parent feedback about previous remote learning experiences? Did you obtain any teacher feedback? Our expectations are very high in this regard, many of us have teaching families and numerous family friends from around the nation and witnessed how their schools handled remote learning while MGS was busy using the excuse of “no time to plan.” We encourage you to review the learning plans presented and compare them to surrounding schools*

Yes. The spring was not good, and everyone agrees that it must be improved. Illinois schools were given specific requirements to assess students in a way that would not lower their grade (<https://www.isbe.net/Documents/RL-Recommendations-3-27-20.pdf#search=Remote%20Learning>), and schools were encouraged to provide an education focused on previously-taught concepts, and/or 2-3 skills, to lighten the workload of students and families in this new crisis (e.g. assignments should help students retain previously-learned material, but limit the teaching of new concepts). Schools across the state struggled to hold students accountable for their learning due to the recommendations of the Illinois State Board of Education. **This school year, many of those guidelines and restrictions are not in place. Staff have worked very hard over the summer to improve the remote learning process.** While some families have the technology available for their children to learn online, other families

do not have the same access. Similarly, some families communicated that they preferred for their child to not be in front of a screen for the duration of the remote learning day.

This year, the plan is for Kindergarten and 1st Grade to use “See Saw”, while grades 2nd-8th will primarily use “Google Classroom”. Staff is aware of the importance of communicating with parents and students to further explain their remote learning process.

- 6. What guidelines are being put in place to check in on teachers to ensure they are effectively performing virtual learning? Please provide detailed documentation on what steps will be taken if remote learning is not considered effective by the parents of the students.*

Teachers are providing schedules to the administration that show consistency and routine for their students. Administration will be observing and supporting the remote learning process on a frequent basis, which includes joining virtual classroom lessons when possible. As a school board, we welcome feedback from parents on the remote learning process for continual improvement. Specific steps will be taken based on the concerns that may be presented.

- 7. Last year when zoom meetings were only conducted to do "show and share" with our children, the internet at teacher's homes was terrible and the students couldn't hear their teachers. Will the teacher's be required to be held to their contract “Teachers will be required to be in the building between the hours of 8:00 a.m. and 3:30 p.m.”?**

Yes. The staff will be following the contract and will be required to be in the building between the hours of 8:00 a.m. and 3:30 p.m.

- 8. Were proper protocols in place to stop the spread of COVID-19 within the school before this decision was made?**

Yes. Classrooms were reconfigured to meet the original three to six feet social distance guidelines from the American Academy of Pediatrics. When the information came to us stating that any students who were less than six feet apart, mask or no mask, for at least 15 minutes, we realized that the configurations would no longer work for providing a stable and consistent educational environment.

Additional steps include the purchase of additional PPE equipment.

- There will be four student entrances each day. Students who are riding to school with parent transportation will, as in the past, use the main front parking lot, as well as the entrance by the Junior High. Buses will use both the door 5 (the entrance that busses have used for years), as well as the playground area near the baseball and softball diamonds. This will be the pattern for both before and after school times.
- Parents have been asked to “self-certify” the health of their child each morning.
- Students will have a temperature check before entering the building each day. All guests to MGS will be screened as well. Plexiglas shields have been installed in both offices.

- Any confirmed cases of COVID-19 will be handled through direct cooperation with the Woodford County Health Department.
 - MGS will now have a Nurse on staff
 - Continual cleaning and sanitizing has been conducted since the shut-down in March, and each classroom has been completely cleaned and sanitized over the summer.
 - The maintenance department will continue to clean and sanitize each day, with specific attention given to common areas of the building (restrooms, drinking fountains, etc.)
 - The district has purchased two electronic, disinfectant sprayers to be used on buses and throughout the building. They will be used on a daily basis. Additional PPE has been purchased as well.
 - The custodial staff has the proper products and equipment, and is undergoing additional training from the health department on the proper cleaning of a COVID-19 area.
 - Additional signs will be posted throughout the building, focusing on hygiene. Hallways will have arrows, etc. to assist students in social distancing.
- 9. What benchmarks and criteria will you be using to determine if the kids can go back to school in 9 weeks? Please provide documented, detailed listing of these. We suggest you put into consideration our MGS parents and the time they have to commit during the day to assist with e-learning.**

A large problem with our original plan became the 6-foot distance guideline from IDPH (and the accompanying contact tracing, quarantine/isolation logistics). The district will need to work collectively with the Health Department over the coming weeks to follow the guidance of the IDPH to assure that we bring students back with safety and guidelines in mind. The BOE, administration, and transition team will develop a plan that involves less students in the building each day and can safely allow for proper spacing in all areas of the building. We remain open to feedback from our parents. The BOE understands the time required for parents to plan their work and childcare schedules, as well as the time required for the school to thoroughly plan for education, bussing, food service, common areas, teacher schedules, IEP needs, etc.

We all share the desire to be back to school for in-person instruction. This was the original plan, and it is still the preferred plan. Clearly, there is an increased burden on parents, students, and teachers. In this regard, the easy route for the school board would have been to continue the schedule as planned in July. The goal is for the Board, administration, and transition team to present an alternative "Return To School" Plan at the September 24, 2020 BOE meeting. The Board is here for our parents, students, teachers, and community, and we appreciate your willingness to reach out to us with your concerns. We believe that we will get through these next five weeks by working together, with all parties involved, and that MGS will continue to build on the tradition of excellence in education that have drawn us to this community.

With respect and appreciation,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Bob Fisher". The signature is stylized and cursive.

Bob Fisher – MGS Board of Education President