



Brookings School District

Working Together...Educating with Excellence...Inspiring Learners for Life

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OPEN MEMO TO THE BROOKINGS COMMUNITY, PARENTS, FAMILIES, STAFF, AND STUDENTS

FROM: Dr. Klint W. Willert, Superintendent of Schools
Mrs. Mellissa Heermann, School Board President

DATE: August 24, 2021

RE: Covid-19 Update for Start of School 2021

Hello parents, families, staff, and students,

On behalf of all at the Brookings School District, we want to welcome you to an exciting school year. The joy and excitement among children for the start of the school is energizing. A great deal of work has occurred over the summer by many staff members in preparation for this year. We can assure you, the Brookings School District staff is eager to welcome learners back to school for the 2021-2022 school year!

We wanted to take a moment to address questions and concerns regarding the 2021-2022 Bobcat Tracks Plan for the safe return to school. The plan was created based on the work of the 2020-2021 Bobcat Tracks Plan. The plan considered information from a number of sources including the community, the Center for Disease Control (CDC), the South Dakota Department of Health, the South Dakota Department of Education, local health care providers, along with school district employees. The plan for the 2021-2022 school year was presented to the school board on July 19. The plan was published on the school district web page for public review and comment. Then, on July 27, the plan was reviewed and discussed once again by the board before being adopted unanimously during the July 27 school board meeting.

The adopted Bobcat Tracks plan, which can be found at <https://www.brookings.k12.sd.us/domain/510>, has four phases for the operation of the school district. Each phase is based upon three factors and considerations. The three factors are:

- 1) impact in the school(s)
- 2) impact in the community and
- 3) impact in the health care system.

These three factors are deliberately considered when the administration and school board determine if a change in the phase needs to occur. Each of these factors and related data points are reviewed as decisions are made regarding the need to change

from one phase of district operations to another. We all know the best decisions are made when considering multiple data points. By utilizing multiple factors to influence decisions, the administration and the school board can make the most prudent and sound decisions for the community we serve.

At the time of this memo, the Brookings School District is operating in Phase I, Green with masks encouraged, but voluntary for students and staff. While the plan to start school with masks being encouraged but voluntary is similar to nearly every other school district in South Dakota, the Brookings School District will responsibly move to the next phase of the Bobcat Tracks Plan when the collective circumstances deem it is necessary.

We also wanted to share the district leadership and school board take student and staff safety seriously. To mitigate the impact of Covid-19 in the schools, several strategies from the 2020-2021 school year continue to be implemented this school year. The district has considerable efforts in place to clean and disinfect surfaces in the school. Regular handwashing is emphasized and encouraged among students and staff alike. Parents are asked to complete health checks on their children prior to sending their child to school each day. Students are immediately sent home if demonstrating symptoms of illness. Nursing hours have been increased in each of the school buildings to help navigate these uncharted waters. Schools and classrooms have hand sanitizing stations. Physical distancing is encouraged and supported when and where possible. These efforts are implemented with one shared community goal in mind – keeping students and staff safe and in school.

Families with medically fragile students have options for their learners. Parents can work with the school building principals or assistant principals to develop a learning plan for a medically fragile child. The plans provide support for the medically fragile child and their educational needs.

Overall, the Brookings School District continues to be committed to the safety, wellbeing, as well as the educational and socio-emotional success of students and staff alike. Together, the school board leadership and the school superintendent communicate daily to assess the three factors previously identified. The school superintendent is in regular communication with the South Dakota Department of Health, the South Dakota Department of Education, as well as the Brookings Health Systems, Avera Brookings, and Sanford Brookings along with other school districts in the region and across South Dakota. The interaction with these individuals and entities ensures our school district is being responsive to the ever-changing landscape as we navigate the Covid-19 pandemic.

In closing, we would like to make one final request. We have to remember our community and our school system has never experienced a situation like the challenge we are facing right now. We must continue to face this challenge together. While there may be differences in perspective and approach, one thing is constant: Our children are watching and learning from us each day. Our reactions and interactions will frame how

our children will react and interact when faced with challenges as adults. We would ask for grace, poise, and consideration as we work together to serve our youth. We are stronger together, and we are all in this together. We must remain a Bobcat family and come through the pandemic together, stronger than before.

Thanks again for your commitment to the Brookings School District.
And remember. . . It is a great day to be a Bobcat!