

To: Trustees and Leadership Team

From: Tom Korst

Date: 9.9.21

Subject: District Response to Staff Absences

All

Thank you for asking the question of how many staff absences would result in a school closure? After spending time with each administrator Wednesday morning, I have prepared a response regarding the primary factors and strategies that are utilized to keep our schools open. The following eight factors constitute the primary criteria to be considered in making the decision whether to close a school building due to staff absences:

1. **Staff/Students:** The number of students in attendance and the number of staff in attendance is the most important factor in determining whether to close a building.
  - a. If staff absences are proportionately > than student absences, then there is a higher likelihood of a school closure.
  - b. If staff absences are proportionately < than student absences then, there is a lower likelihood of a school closure.
2. **Substitutes:** Filled v. unfilled substitutes. Our ability to fill open teaching positions with substitutes will directly impact our staff to student ratio (see 1, above). We currently have about 34 registered substitutes.
3. **Reassigning Classified Staff:** Reassigning classified staff as temporary substitutes may be an option for filling open teaching positions. Per the classified CBA classified staff may sub in a classroom at higher rate of pay called momentary assignment. However, the ability to reassign classified staff to the classroom is contingent on the classified staff member's willingness and ability to teach and whether or not they are a one-on-one para who is responsible for a single child or small group.
4. **Reassigning Specialists:** Each building has a different mix of content specialists (music, library, art, HPE, etc.). At Daly, specialist could be reassigned to an open teaching position in a general education classroom. Whereas, specialists in the Middle School and High School cannot be reassigned.
5. **Combining Classes:** The ability to combine classrooms may provide a temporary solution for some open teaching positions. This solution is most viable at the High School where average class size can be dramatically different; with some sections having fewer than 10 students. It may be possible to combine some afternoon electives at the Middle School. However, Daly does not typically have the ability to combine classrooms, especially given our reopening plan.
6. **Planning Periods:** Teachers may voluntarily give up their planning period to substitute for an absent teacher. The effectiveness of this option will depend on how many teachers are willing and able to substitute teach during their planning period.

7. **Administrators:** Principals, assistant principals, and central office administrators may also substitute for open teaching positions depending on availability.
8. **District-Wide:** It may be possible to transfer staff from one building to another to cover for open teaching positions. Again, the effectiveness of this option depends on variables such as the willingness and ability of the staff member to cover the classroom(s) in question.

There is no specific number that can adequately answer the original question of how many staff absences would result in a school closure. As demonstrated above, this decision is heavily contingent on at least eight factors. Historically, each building has been able to function with enough supervision with up to 10 unfilled vacancies. After that, it becomes increasingly difficult to do so. Twenty unfilled vacancies will certainly shut a school down unless the student population is commensurately reduced.

Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that the closer a building gets to twenty unfilled vacancies, the more likely it is to close. **Other factors not specifically itemized above, but which may play a deciding role in whether the District remains open or closed include food service and transportation absences.**

In the event of a large scale District-wide absence scenario, it would be my recommendation that we do our best to keep Daly open by reassigning staff from the Middle School and High School. Our younger students require the highest level of supervision and closing Daly would have the greatest impact on our families and community if sent home unsupervised.

Additionally, it is worth noting that the Ravalli County Health Department may require one of the buildings or the entire District to close to manage disease transmission if a large number of staff and/or students absent due to illness (whether it is Covid-19 or otherwise).