



WEEKLY CHECK IN NOTES



Heads of School

Questions? Reach out to Debra Shaffer Seeman debras@prizmah.org

September 25, 2020

How are you? How's your team? What's a live topic for you this week?

- How to speak with your kids when someone tests positive. Parents are shaming those who test positive.
- No need to shut down the whole school with one positive case.
- Sukkot vs school - do we stay virtual? Do we keep the building open during Sukkot?
- Concurrent teaching is challenging
- Teacher's mental health
- We've had positive cases in the school -
- Teachers whose kids were tested positive are teaching remotely and got subs for them.
- Subs were exposed as well. So administrators are being subs in the classrooms.
- Permanent at home is 8%, Temporary at home is 25% and in one other school 2 families are permanently remote and other students have a 24 hour window before they can learn by remote in elementary. Middle school students are coming in same day and are Zooming in by tablet held by another student in the class. Another school remote learners joining in-person until after the chaggim.
- A lot of moving parts. Building a culture where safety matters to everyone in the same way.
- Disparity between observant Jews with mask wearing. Higher rates in observant areas.
- Stress levels are astronomical.
- Departments of Health are being really helpful and it's been easy to work with them.
- Feeling compassion for those families that have chosen to keep the students home.

Going Remote for a week after the chaggim to mitigate the spread?

- Considered it, but families would just stay away for an extended period and not stay home to quarantine.
- Most schools not going remote for the week after the chaggim
- One HS is doing that.

Supporting teacher morale

- Teachers not able to take a bathroom/lunch break because we're understaffed.
- Negative teachers are spreading the toxicity in really challenging ways.
- We've added floaters so adults can take 15 minute breaks.
- Gotten flack for doing nice things
- For some of our staff, we can't ever do enough.
- Had teachers crying in the halls every day at the start of the year.
- So afraid for his life that he was losing his temper with everyone. Yelling at kids closer than 6 feet. Needed intensive conversations and check-ins
- Check-ins and listening.
- Also experiencing sensory overload. Microphones on, doors open, windows open. The stimulation is draining. And teachers have so much gear on.
- Giving teachers time off.
- More teamwork and more connection and energy than in the past. Both from the in-person and online teaching staff. Recognition of the magnitude of the challenge. Doing this as well as we are as a tribute to each of the teachers and all they're doing. We say that over and over again.
- Pumping up the teachers - finding words to describe themselves with examples, identifying a positive trait in each of them with an example. Every staff meeting has an appreciation activity.
- Salary cuts for more work.
- This is relationship based!!
- Use [this resource](#) with ideas about building morale with your team.

Admission/Retention this year

- Virtual tours
- 1:1 calls for new parents
- Calls to families that have left
- Assessing whether students are a good fit without an in-person shadow day.
- We're going to use Zoom interviews (and did in the spring) - and using Zoom for a shadow day.

Development

- How do we capitalize on happy times (50th anniversary, etc) to bring the community together, rather than simply making it about finances?
- Planning Fall annual campaign online. Growing and diversifying our development process. We lowered our expectations. We will cover COVID costs this year, but next year is anyone's guess right now.
- Notes from our Development Director check ins can be found [here](#).

Strategic planning

- Larger number of year two tasks are irrelevant now than would ordinarily be the case.

- Need to educate the board that we don't have to/can't accomplish these items right now. Can't rethink our Identity Proposition this year.
-

Topic on our radar:

- Students in crisis
 - Yes, higher levels of mental health challenges
 - Many of our online learners have baseline mental health challenges
 - Seems like our students are basically okay right now.
- Philanthropy/fundraising beyond COVID
- New family retention plans & strategies
- Helping their board see beyond COVID
- What medium to long-term planning project is highest on their priority list right now.
- Remind them to complete DASL if they haven't already done so.
- What resources do they/their teams need from Prizmah before December?
- Substitute teachers
- Navigating in and out of building
-

September 11, 2020

How are you? How's your team? What's a live topic for you this week?

- Several day schools in Baltimore have had cases
- We need to report every child with symptoms and the paperwork for that is insane
- Feel like we're playing whack a mole all the time.
- Very worried about chaggim and community behavior exposure.
- Community statement about schools reopening after the chaggim, hoping to delay the in-person open by a couple of weeks to wait for COVID to present.
- Because we are not a health department, we can't tell families that they can not quarantine. We can tell them they are excluded from on-campus instruction.
 - Can tell them that they should follow CDC guidelines regarding quarantine.
 - Don't necessarily need to quarantine a whole class, rather a portion of the class depending on the extent of exposure. At the moment, we understand that DPH will ask who the child was sitting near. Were there other times during the day/week when they could have been less than 6 feet for more than 15 minutes with someone else? Perhaps, then, only those 4 children around the sick child is quarantining.
 - In other areas, 15 minutes total cumulative time of time spent over 1 day or 2 days.
 - Proximate contact - outside of 6 feet, for at least an hour, over the course of a day, is not being enforced for quarantine. Those students are not considered a part of the same cohort.
 - Policy may change, stay on top of developments.

- Specialists having a hard time with early childhood students who are having trouble with consistent masks.
- Considering bringing grades 1-2 back in person on rotation (as part of “vulnerable population”
- We’re okay.
- Back to school spirits are pretty good.
- Only complaint we’re hearing is that the day is too long and taxing for our child. We’re working to “soften” the day.
- One school fully in-person, all others partly in-person.
- Teachers are generally doing fine, now that we’re open.
- LA schools not coming back in-person until November as earliest.
- 50% live and 50% remote program in Florida. Needed the virtual program option. Lower school is fully virtual, middle/high schools are hybrid. High school has students in 2 days, out 2 days.
- The kids are SO happy.

What do do about the Chaggim?

- After shul kiddush, bball games are happening. We can’t mandate their behavior.
- We hope they make responsible choices.

Parents? How are they doing - what’s the range of behaviors you’re seeing

- Pleased with the virtual program
- Parents of younger children are the most difficult
- Parent body is the most time consuming of this work. Keeping our pulse on both the in-person and online program. Our ability to pivot created a happy parent body. They feel appreciated and valued.
- I know you value your online students as much as your in-person students. Your principals do not seem to feel that way. That’s really challenging. Such a reality check.
- All the planning worked.
- The families I’m hearing from are the virtual families who are seeing what’s going on in the classroom.
- My parents are thrilled. Very grateful. Our community wanted to be in-person. We are meeting the needs of the handful of families who wanted to be at home.
- Carpool has been going really well.
- Sticking points: ECD - level of uncertainty and roller coaster ride. Parents need backup plans, that’s the way the year is going to go.
- I’m more concerned about my teachers in the elementary school. We’re still looking for classroom assistants and one specialist. The elementary teachers are exhausted.
- Parents are happy enough in general. Level of concern or complaint is low by “normal” year standards given that it’s the end of the third week of school for us.
- Having a hard time in ECD (and expect this more widely) - keeping parents masked and inside their cards is very difficult.

At what point in time with in-person students is COVID testing mandatory?

- California has mandated that teachers tested every 2 months. 25% of the teachers every 2 weeks. No requirements regarding student testing.
- We do not make recommendations to families about student testing. We tell them that they should call their pediatrician and let them decide whether testing is necessary.
- We've asked for a letter from a doctor clearing them back to school. Some doctors won't sign those letters.

Community expectations of social distancing. How's that working for you?

- We have a community responsibility agreement that parents signed. We have nothing we can do to enforce that. We have no authority, but we ask for their partnership.
- I've told my faculty to be very careful about what they post on social media.
- All of our community heads of school signed a letter together and sent out.
- Receiving postings from social media. This person did X not wearing masks with their arms around each other.
- High school students. Teacher was teaching remotely. 2 kids in the same car, during class. 2 kids in the same house, not related to one another. What do you want us to do about this?
- We set the expectation for families, but we did not create a contract so we're not refereeing these situations.
- Beautiful opportunity for conversations with families. Does it matter to the school what happens outside the building? Is this school's purview? Does the school day end when classes are over? The "reach" of school has gotten larger than it previously was for some communities.

September 4, 2020

- We are being extra sensitive to our staff, as many did not get raises, pay was decreased and or have extra duties are working very hard. Already thinking how to making next year look different for them
- When we have the time to think past COVID how will we take what we have learned from this and implement new ways of reaching students, schedules, etc. What will that new model look like?
- Many school starting remote and slowly bringing back groups of students to campus, usually by age group
- Car pools are a mess, especially where there is no busing
- Many schools see enrollment uptick; 100 new students, 26 new families with 39 new students; some in Florida are transplants from the northeast; families enrolling who were going elsewhere; other schools losing due to lack of in person for youngest students or families moved
- LA challenged by schools opening as camps, not fully within guidelines and hard for those schools not willing to do so
- Teachers are grieving for the ways they know how to teach and the innovations they had made and cannot implement in this new setting; they are exhausted
- One school has opened a faculty kids room for those faculty who have kids in schools who are remote; they hired an aide who is with the kids while they are remote with their schools
- A mixed blessing that parents cannot come on campus, especially in the ECE
- One school has implemented a social responsibility pledge to opt into if you want your child on campus; if not please learn from home. Honor system; almost all have signed
- Some finding success with microphones; others using ear buds
- One parent whose child is in physical school asked if they could zoom into the classroom...NO! Another parent was actively participating in morning meeting; another texted the teacher to say :”can’t you see my kids has their hand up, Why are you not calling on him?”
- NO idea how expensive this year would be; if had to keep to my budget we would have closed; we must hit numbers with donors we have never hit before; one school doing a \$300,000 matching campaign during the fall chaggim

August 28, 2020

How is your team doing?

- Angst of teachers have reduced significantly.
- Team is doing okay, still happy to be back together.

- Nearly everyone is feeling safe here b/c we know that you've followed all the guidelines. Thank you.
- Everything coming together.
- I am not trained to handle this.
- Staff is walking in on Monday - I don't know what to tell them.
- I'm doing fine. Students are doing well.
- Staff emotion and drama has dropped to a normal level and are now dealing with "regular" non COVID issues.
- Administrators are spent and done and I'm worried about them.
- It's hard to walk around nervous all the time. This time period is anxiety provoking.
- First week of school: kids are doing fine - so excited to be back. Wearing masks well.
- Exhausted

What's on your plate

- Still need adults to be with the students while teachers are remote.
- Board is looking at raising a lot of money.
- Schools that have started have leaders feeling really good
- Desks on back order - looking forward to those arriving.
- Easing the early childhood students into mask wearing and it's really coming together.
- 7th grade students back channel chatting - we decided to take away their laptops to get that under control.
- Middle school is down 40% student enrollment. Had to move out of the building and get new licensing b/c we can't afford to be there with the reduced enrollment.
- One teacher just resigned the week before school starts. She was offered more money
- Teachers feel so relieved that students can play games together.

What's one resource that's been really helpful for you this week?

- Support from Prizmah on board-head role definitions when it comes to closing the budget gap that COVID has created.
- Having the team
- Got a tech support person in to help with our stress test. Having another person do a tech consult.
- CARES act money allowed us to pay for
- Ari Leubitz's letter

Recommendations to your colleagues

- Do a stress test on your system - bandwidth is fine, but the cinderblocks are tough. Putting access points in every room.
- Use GoGuardian so that the teacher can see the students' screen.

Questions:

Thinking about how we nurture teachers academically and do PD on zoom. Are there any really good synch/asynch PD avail online?

- David Shar - set up structures to prevent burnout. Very compelling speaker. Illuminate PMC. David@illuminatepmc.com

- BER Bureau of Education and Research. www.ber.org Great Online PD. It does cost but topics are excellent both academic, mental health and more.
-

Hybrid - both online and in-person students working with the same teacher.

- [Lindy Hockenbary](#)
- Fluid structure for students
- Locked in until Oct 30th
- Centers model

August 21, 2020

How are you and how's your team?

- Every day is better than the day before
- Every day is one day closer to winter break
- We have the 'regular for the start of the school year' struggles
- Technology trouble. Connectivity is not as seamless as we wish it was.
- 10% are learning from home
- Released a comprehensive plan last night - we start after Labor Day
- Toronto: everyone in person pre-K-8th, we had 18 applications for one K spot.
- Staff week was absolutely crazy.
- Florida: Enrolled 100 students this week, another 80 on the waiting list. Our numbers are still down from last year. We have another 300 students who want to join in January.
- Our enrollment is down b/c families don't want to drive the hour without last year's transportation.
- We don't have enough money for the outdoor spaces, towels, chairs,
- K had a major mutiny this week. Teacher can't come into the building. Parents blew up and started pods, including a member of the exec committee of our board. Trying to hire a second in-person staff member.
- 30 new students, lost 10 students.
- Our board was a circus before this - this has only amplified.
- The love and passion I have for this job has been sucked out 1000 times over.
- Donor stepped forward to write a \$400k to reinstate all raises for staff and faculty.

How's your team?

- Stressed out to the max - we're asking them to do a lot more than ever before
- Responding to the community members
- Pace is brutal - haven't had a single day off this summer.
- It's insanity
- Shabbat is in 7 hours, even for our non-Jewish team members
- Very difficult to cope with such a small team.
- We traveled through the storm. We've either traveled to the eye of the storm or we're doing better b/c we've started the year.

- The admin team feels like it's November already. How will we get all the way to Sukkot.
- It's intense and exhausting
- I don't even know what to say.
- More of the same, more on my shoulders, more intense
- Teachers are enjoying being with one another in person
- Good team, working hard
-

During this call, which topic(s) would you most benefit from conversation with colleagues?

- Rules for the teachers.
- I would like to know how Rabbi L's staggered rollout has gone. What did he learn about the strengths and weaknesses of the experience that he can share with us?
 - Best choice we've made. Allowed for all the adults to be available for the youngest members of the community. Helped us all to work together on the glitches and we learned so much from having all hands on deck with the little guys.
 - I liked it so much that I would absolutely consider doing it this way again next year.
- Looking for help with tech assistance - on some glitches with conducting live and virtual class simultaneously
- I would like to hear more from Steven about how the youngest kids actually can and can't wear masks
- Template letters
 - Possible case, we are taking precautions, you should take precautions (hand hygiene, masks), we'll keep you informed.
 - Confirmed case - everyone who has been in close contact, you need to quarantine.
 - Prizmah is collecting all of these templates to share with the field.
- Putting in a geofence around campus. Everyone needs to carry a tracer/phone app. We'll know anyone who was within 6 feet of a positive case. Then we can alert families with certainty.
- How are you doing recess?
<https://www.asphaltgreen.org/blog/rep-it-out-games-for-social-distancing> And check out the new group for PE teachers below.

Resources

- <https://learn.joffeemergencyservices.com/>
- <https://prizmah.org/gatherings>
- <https://prizmah.org/prizmah-network/reshet-groups>
 - **Admission Professionals (schools with fewer than 150 students)**
 - **Admission Professionals (the whole field)**

- Art Teachers
- **Development Professionals**
- **Heads of ECD-12 schools**
- **Judaic Administrators**
- Kindergarten Teachers
- Music Teachers
- **Physical Education Teachers**
- School Counselors