

Pandemic Response Committee Report

Background:

Almost exactly one year ago fears around the spread of Covid-19 and the potential human devastation left TCA, like so many other organizations and institutions, shaken to its core. We were forced into an at home learning model that lasted through the end of the school year. The 20-21 school year began more normally, but with quarantines, closures, masks, social distancing, etc. It is safe to say that none of us have ever experienced this in our lifetimes.

As time has passed we, as a society and as a school community, have learned quite a lot about various elements of our response to the virus itself, as well as, the protocols that have been created to help manage it.

To better understand how we as a school community responded, the TCA board has formed the Pandemic Response Committee (PRC). This committee seeks to accomplish the following:

- Assess where we are as a school community with respect to our response to Covid-19.
- Ensure we are doing all we can to keep kids and teachers in school and safe.
- Review what we have learned over time.
- Help make sure that parent voices are heard.
- Make recommendations for action by the full TCA board for this and other unforeseen events that could disrupt school in the future.
- Write a policy for review and approval by the full TCA board that provides guidance and parameters for decision making for the current Covid-19 pandemic and potential future pandemics or other disruptive events.

The PRC includes three members of the TCA board, one member of the mental health community, two medical doctors, and a health care administrator – all TCA parents, former TCA parents or professionals directly engaged with the TCA community.

The TCA Response:

In response to the unprecedented Covid-19 closures and the potential impact on TCA, the administration quickly formed the eight member Covid Response Team (CRT) comprised of four nurses, a representative from Academic Services, one representative from the President's office, and two representatives from operations.

Their mandate from the administration, as we understand it, was to:

- Work closely with public health to understand the ramifications of the myriad of guidelines, regulations, executive orders, etc. as it relates to the operation of schools.
- Develop plan to safely allow for school reopening, ensuring the safety of our students/staff.
- Develop guidelines on quarantines/closures.
- Ensure that we could minimize risk of infection, maximize days in school.

- Work directly with TCA families as incidences of infection and quarantine were presented.
- Advise TCA administration on clinical matters.

The Discovery Process

The PRC and the CRT met on February 22 to discuss the current state of our response efforts. Additionally, the PRC worked with legal counsel to discern where our response was bound by law. The CRT was very forthcoming and answered in detail the following questions:

- Who is the public health authority that we follow? Is their guidance clear?
- Where does the 14 day quarantine standard come from?
- Do we have latitude to adjust our approach as conditions change?
- Is the CRT actively looking for ways to minimize our quarantine frequency/duration
- What monitoring requirements are imposed on us by state/local officials?
- What does “presumed positive” actually mean?
- Do we treat presumed positives the same as an actual Covid positive test result?
- Have we considered other quarantine durations or only the 14 day model?
- How do we administer quarantines i.e. individual, cohort, class, school?
- Are there situations where a negative Covid test would not be enough to allow a student back on campus?
- Why are athletes quarantined differently than others?
- Have we engaged the mental health community?
- Are you sufficiently staffed to do your job?
- Are there any resources that you lack?

Findings:

- The overriding opinion of the PRC regarding the CRT and their efforts is that they are, as a group, impressive, professional, dedicated, and thorough and should be commended for their efforts. They have served with excellence through difficult times, often investing long hours, significantly beyond the requirements of their jobs. Our TCA community has benefitted greatly from their service.
- The PRC also believes that they have understood that their mandate was to do everything in their power to keep kids in school and have operated toward that end. They have faced a myriad of guidance, recommendations, etc. from public health agencies and have done a stellar job navigating those with public health.
- The work of the CRT has resulted in a 14 day quarantine strategy utilizing seating charts and extensive contact tracing and this 14 day model was done at the direction (although ambiguous) of El Paso County Health (EPCH). This use of the seating charts, while

difficult to manage, has allowed for the quarantining of individuals and cohorts versus entire classes. This effort should be maintained.*

- It must be noted that we, along with other charter schools in the area, have been open 4 days a week since the beginning of the school year (with the exception of the last month of the school year before the holidays). Other main-line schools within D20 are only now considering 4 days a week in class.
- As part of the review process, we've also found that there are some opportunities to enhance our overall approach. The CRT was formed and functions as a clinical/medical response team with a laser focus on the clinical side of managing this crisis. While they are aware of the mental health effects of the crisis, they are not positioned to be able to explore, understand and act on the considerations of the growing mental health crisis brought on by extended quarantines and isolation.
- Further, there are outlier situations regarding quarantines and other Covid protocols, and their effect on individual students that need to be reviewed. The CRT is not positioned to be the arbitrator of outlier situations and as a result these special situations have no clear avenue for redress nor is there an avenue for parents to cite their concerns.
- The PRC also finds that there is a significant opportunity for TCA to educate and communicate more frequently and more effectively with parents. The communication from TCA to families was insufficient, particularly regarding the decision making process with respect to quarantines and closures.
- The PRC is also aware that the 14 day quarantine model has been successfully lowered to a 10 day model by both other districts/schools in El Paso County with the agreement of EPCH. Based on discussions with both legal and medical counsel, we believe that we have both legally and medically sound flexibility to immediately communicate our intention to do so to EPCH and to implement a 10 day quarantine model for the TCA community.*
- The board, the administration and the CRT could have acted more rapidly in assessing the ongoing situation and creating policies guiding the schools longer-term response to the pandemic. All elements of the school community can and should work more closely together to ensure that we are responding with excellence and timeliness.
- The quarantine structure for athletes has been mandated by CHSAA, not by TCA nor D20. It is only changeable if they change it.*

- There have been incidences of “over-compliance” such as restrictions on return to play for athletes that go above and beyond health department guidelines. Legal risk could exist for incidence of over-compliance as isolation and quarantines grow in their duration.
- Legal risk exists if we act to prevent children with chronic conditions, such as asthma, from attending school based on our assessment of their condition versus their own family doctor’s opinion on the root cause of the present difficulty. This could represent a violation of the ADA.
- The risk of child self-harm grows as the length of isolation and quarantines grow.

Recommendations for TCA Board (Via Policy/s):

- Develop and Utilize an incident command structure, including but not limited to, the following:
 - The Pandemic Response Committee shall be reconstituted at any time there is an incident that represents a potential for significant harm to students or for extended school closures, such as the Covid-19 pandemic or other unforeseen circumstances.
 - The PRC, with advice from legal, medical and other such counsel as may be necessary at the time, shall work with the board to create policy with respect to the overall response plans and shall work to verify that those policies are appropriately implemented by the administration.
 - There is great benefit in the dialogue already undertaken between the CRT and PRC. We recommend that the CRT and PRC (with input from legal/medical professionals) continue to meet on a monthly basis (or upon the introduction or update of new/significant regulation) to discuss new/changing regulations, implementation, etc.
 - Form a committee to explore and act on the mental health aspect of this and other crisis situations. Should consist of mental health professionals, parents, academic/administrators as well as a liaison from the CRT.
 - Implement a communications structure and strategy aimed at informing staff, students and families of ongoing progress, decisions, etc. (The D38 dashboard should serve as an example).
 - Develop and implement a communications structure that informs both the administration and the board on pertinent data such as numbers of infections, numbers of kids quarantined, proposed changes to quarantine or control data, etc.

- In order to provide parents a clear avenue for having outlier situations addressed, the PRC recommends the development of a Student Advocacy Group to hear medical outliers/complaints/situations directly related to quarantines, extra-curricular endeavors, etc. so that the CRT/PRC is not directly responsible for adjudicating legitimate complaints/disagreements incurred as a result of our policies and protocols.
- Direct that the schools ongoing policy shall be to seek, as a first choice, the least restrictive quarantine policy allowable under law and that more restrictive policies shall be recommended as necessary by the administration and reviewed by the full board of directors. This would include restrictions desired by various departments for specific departmental activities.
- That TCA should adopt a policy that directs a move from a 14 day quarantine structure to a 10 day structure in accordance with the CDC's "Options to Reduce Quarantine Using Symptom Monitoring and Diagnostic Testing" document dated December 2, 2020. Further, to adjust monitoring requirements on days 11-14 to "self-monitoring" as outlined in the CDC documentation and in proposed TCA board policy.*

Additionally, That TCA will modify its' perspective regarding labeling Covid positive students such that when Covid positive students are not able to readily identify a confirmed out of school exposure, TCA will not automatically label/treat those positives as school exposures. Only in the event where a Covid positive student has a known school related exposure to another Covid positive person will they be labeled as a school exposure.*

Also that the quarantine "clock" should be reset upon completion of a 10 day quarantine. This means that in the event that a student develops significant symptoms warranting Covid quarantine on days 11-14, this new quarantine will be enacted upon the new "close contact" cohort and not automatically upon the original quarantine cohort.*

The following reasons explain our rationale for these recommended changes.

- Because the CDC authorized the aforementioned changes and even less restrictive models more than three months ago,
- Because other schools and school districts in El Paso county have successfully worked with EPCH based on the CDC guidelines and adopted a 10 day quarantine,
- Because the CDC has indicated a 1.4% chance of transmission after day 10,
- Because the core values of TCA, recognize and seek to help the mind and the spirit, in addition to the body of each person in the TCA community,

- Because of the recognition of the developing mental health crisis brought on by extended periods of isolation and quarantine,
 - Because we recognize the educational benefits of having kids learning in school versus learning at home,
 - Because, the administration has made provision and accommodation for each teacher/staff member within high risk category to work away from students and campus.
 - Because teachers/staff/some students are now being vaccinated.
- With a growing number of vaccinations against Covid-19, we recommend that the administration develop and announce a plan for those students/staff who have been vaccinated on how to avoid future quarantines.

Conclusions:

None of us have ever experienced the events of the last 12 months. Covid-19 has required solutions to problems that have never been considered. The pandemic initially forced the school to close, then reopen with severe limitations. We responded by creating the Covid Response Team and they have performed admirably.

As time has progressed, we realize that there are risks associated with Covid and our response to Covid that go beyond the clinical. Those risks, including self-harm, suicide, drug use, overdose, anxiety, depression, etc. are real and must be considered as we learn and adjust over time.

By acting together as a whole, by leaning on the expertise of parts of our community in addition to the clinical and by being nimble in our ability to adjust to changing circumstances, the PRC believes that we will weather this storm and perhaps be the better for it.

We are Titans!

Respectfully submitted,

The Pandemic Response Committee

*Shortly after the completion and submission of this report, the administration announced new rules lowering the quarantine times from 14 days to 10 days (without a negative Covid test) and 7 days (with a negative Covid test). While there are yet details to be worked out, we are grateful for the announcement of this pending change.