

SLSD *from B1*

rounding a September restart for SLSD, inching ever closer by the day.

“[Electing co-vice chairs] is a decision we did not anticipate,” Bengtson said after the vote, “but I think it’s a good outcome and it makes me feel a lot less nervous going into next year.”

**School Reopening**

The decisions regarding school restarts are almost entirely centered around student and faculty safety in the face of an ongoing viral threat: Is it safe to come to school? Should attendees wear masks? What happens if a student, teacher or administrator falls ill? What about parents who don’t feel comfortable sending their children back into the classroom yet? What will distance learning look like?

With scientific understanding regarding the coronavirus evolving on a near-daily basis, none of these questions have clear answers, but the SLSD remains committed to searching for solutions.

“We are hoping that the content planning team that’s been working on the schedule is going to have reached consensus around a schedule,” said Curtis. The district could have more answers over the next week.

It’s a near certainty that students will attend school in cohorts – an A group and a B group – who both attend in-person school two days per week with a Wellness Wednesday in between so SLSD staff can continue their ongoing outreach to students and families. The remaining question is how those two days will be divided up, whether one group attends Mon.-Tue. with the other attending Thurs.-Fri. (AA-BB model), or split days with a group on Mon. and Thurs. and the other on Tues. and Fri (A-B model).

“I’m anticipating that it’s going to be the A-B model with Wellness Wednesday,” Curtis said.

This, however, is largely a plan for middle and high school students where at-home child care on off days and after school is less of an issue. Perhaps even larger questions remain regarding elementary school as the district works with local childcare providers, such as the YMCA, to find a workable, synthesized solution that can serve the whole community.

“We’ve been really concerned about elementary kids being at home by themselves

and felt like if we can see them every day, we would prefer that. So, our staff started working on an A.M./P.M. schedule to see if that could work,” Curtis said of a potential plan that would have all elementary students in school five days per week with each day split into a morning cohort and an afternoon cohort. “The problem is, we can’t make it work with transportation.”

Thus, SLSD and other districts across the state and county – who have largely been in consistent contact with one another to compare plans and ideas – are finding that some form of A/B schedule at all levels is the only feasible way forward when considering transportation and staffing.

Recent parent surveys handed out by SLSD staff illustrate that local families overwhelmingly want their children to be able to return to in-person learning, but given the number of potential barriers to do so safely, Curtis also emphasized that honing their approach to distance learning is still high on the list of priorities.

“[It’s] something we have to get better at and we plan to get better,” Curtis said of the district’s online instruction offerings.

But again, it’s an issue that conjures ever more questions and possible snags in the plan.

“We have had teachers come to us and say, ‘I’m going to have to quit my job if I have to be at home with my kids doing online,’” Curtis said. “We know this is a challenge for all families, so we know it’s something we have to figure out, but it’s been frustrating enough to figure out how we’re going to do the schooling.”

In all populations – staff, students and administrators – there are members who don’t feel comfortable returning given the current state of COVID-19. There are more details that need ironing out than not. A recent update from the state has said that students 11 years or younger cannot wear masks at school. It’s a confounding situation where the only certainty is that the 2020-21 school year will look very different from any year past.

“We can absolutely conclusively say that

when someone finishes their senior year next year, they’re not going to be where we thought they were going to be 12 months ago,” said board member Gary Mort.

**Equity and Social Justice**

The final topic of discussion at Monday’s meeting largely centered around the district’s approach to equity and social justice.

While equity programs that targeted traditionally underserved groups have been a focus at SLSD for some time now, growing wealth inequality, a COVID-19 situation that has been shown to disproportionately affect minority populations and a national social justice protest movement has put these issues even more at the forefront.

“We had already made a commitment in our district to do that equity focus, but with what’s going on in the world, in the United States, in our state, we certainly have to take a stance,” Curtis said. “This is a perfect opportunity to reinvent public education to be what kids really need.”

The first step of the district’s current efforts involved

reaching out to students and faculty with the goal of putting together a unified stance to social justice and a group of students at the high school – which already has an existing student equity team that’s working within the community - have decided to write a draft of the proposal themselves given their experiences in SLSD.

“What we’ve heard from both students and teachers working with us is, we have overt racism in our high school,” Curtis added. “People making comments, people pushing kids out and everyone I’ve talked to at the high school has said, ‘Absolutely. That happens,’ and so that’s something that we have

## SVA looking to fill board vacancies

South Valley Athletics (SVA) is currently looking to fill open positions on their Board of Directors.

It is a volunteer position and board members join in on planning future sports programs as well as giving input on ongoing activities.

The SVA board meets monthly and members are also expected to help out with various sports and events throughout the year.

Now is the perfect time to

get involved, when things are slow, but hoping to get back up and running soon.

Applicants must be 18 or older and be able to pass a background check. Interested parties do not need to have kids in the program to become a member of the board.

To apply and learn more, text or call 541-942-3079 or contact SVA via email at southvalleyathletics@gmail.com

to stop.

Additionally, Curtis and Cottage Grove High School principal Kevin Herrington are planning to host a listening session to hear from South Lane students of color and their experiences and concerns locally.

“It’s a safe environment for them to share what their experiences have been in this community and in their schools and if [they] got to tell us what to do, what can we work on first,” Curtis said. “What I tell people all the time is, equity work and social justice work is heart-and-soul work. It’s about peoples’ belief systems. It’s not instructional strategy, so you don’t know where it’s going to go once you get started.”

In the same vein, SLSD may only know where the 2020-21 school year will go once it gets started. There are no directions for a road never travelled and the muddled COVID-19 situation is proving to be a particularly difficult route.

In any case, a unified approach, communication with local families and students, and community trust are at the heart of all these issues and Curtis and the rest of the SLSD board are still finding space for optimism.

“Teachers are saying their relationships with students are stronger than they’ve ever been because they were required to check in [during the COVID-19 shutdown] and they’re still going to be required to check in at least twice a week with each student and family,” Curtis said. “A big step in equity work is understanding the families and what they need.”

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# WATER SAFETY TIPS

Whether it’s a trip to the beach or a dip in the community or backyard pool, you can ensure that swimming is as safe as it is fun by following a few basic safety tips.

### THERE IS NO SUBSTITUTE FOR ACTIVE SUPERVISION

Actively supervise children in and around open bodies of water, giving them your undivided attention.

Whenever infants or toddlers are in or around water, an adult should be within arm’s reach to provide active supervision. We know it’s hard to get everything done without a little multitasking, but this is the time to avoid distractions of any kind. If children are near water, then they should be the only thing on your mind. Small children can drown in as little as one inch of water.

### EDUCATE YOUR KIDS ABOUT SWIMMING SAFELY

Every child is different, so enroll children in swimming lessons when you feel they are ready. Teach children how to tread water, float and stay by the shore.

Make sure kids swim only in areas designated for swimming. Teach children that swimming in open water is not the same as swimming in a pool.

They need to be aware of uneven surfaces, river currents, ocean undertow and changing weather.

Whether you’re swimming in a backyard pool or in a lake, teach children to swim with a partner, every time. From the start, teach children to never go near or in water without an adult present.

You can start introducing your babies to water when they are about 6 months old. Remember to always use waterproof diapers and change them frequently.

### DON'T RELY ON SWIMMING AIDS

- Remember that swimming aids such as water wings or noodles are fun toys for kids, but they should never be used in place of a U.S. Coast Guard-approved personal flotation device (PFD).

### TAKE THE TIME TO LEARN CPR

We know you have a million things to do, but learning CPR should be on the top of the list. It will give you tremendous peace of mind – and the more peace of mind you have as a parent, the better.

Local hospitals, fire departments and recreation departments offer CPR training.

Have your children learn CPR. It’s a skill that will serve them for a lifetime.

### SUMMER BOATING TIPS:

Alcohol and boating don’t mix. Studies have shown that even a small amount of alcohol, when combined with the marine environment, can seriously impair your judgement. Passengers should avoid going “overboard” as well.

When fueling your boat, stop all engines, motors, and other devices that could produce sparks. Always leave with a full tank.

Conduct a safety orientation before leaving the pier. This includes location of life preservers, how to put them on, location of life rafts and location of emergency check-off list.

Be prepared. Talk to experienced service personnel about what kind of parts and tools you should carry on your boat. A first-aid kit and emergency supplies are also a must.

Check the weather before leaving and heed all small craft advisories.

Make a float plan and make sure someone on shore knows your exact route.