

School Opening Update

1 file • Chris Young • 18 days ago • Thursday, Aug 8 at 6:16 PM • **North Country Union High School**

Good evening everyone!

Well, this is not the 'back-to-school' message that I anticipated sending when we left school in June! By now, you have likely heard about, read about, or seen news clips regarding the PCB work happening at the high school and career center this summer. As a quick recap, we learned of high levels in B-Wing in early July, scaled up the mitigation project that was originally only scheduled for C-Wing, and began to work with the state agencies to coordinate the work and plan for school reopening this fall. Here is the [Summer '24 PCB Letter](#) that went out on July 22nd.

As you can imagine, working with three state agencies, our consultants, and our contractors to try to monitor the work progress and plan for the fall has taken almost all of our time this summer. I do apologize if it feels that there has been a lack of communication, but the truth is that there have been more questions than answers and anything I sent out between the end of July and now would have likely caused more confusion and anxiety. The main question that needed to be addressed was whether or not we would start school with remote learning.

At the special board meeting last night that several of you attended, our board answered that question by directing the administration to develop a plan to open school in-person, on-time, and in the safest manner possible. I believe that this is the best direction for our school community, and one that our students and parents will support as well. That said, developing this plan will not be an easy task. I presented the following scenarios to the board last night:

<u>Scenarios</u>	<u>Impact</u>
Most test results are within the SAL/IAL with no or minimal loss of spaces.	School begins on time and in person on NCUHS and NCCC Campuses.
Some test results are not within IAL and there is significant loss of spaces	School begins on time and in person on NCUHS and NCCC campuses with significant disruption to schedules and programs based on space needs and availability.
Most test results are not within IAL and there is significant loss of spaces.	School may be delayed and classes moved to off-site locations

At the very earliest, we will begin to get air test results on the C-Wing by August 16, 2024. While these results won't be specific to B-Wing classrooms, they will give us some information about the effectiveness of mitigation work and what we might expect when we start to get results for B-Wing, which will be by August 23rd at the earliest.

This timeline leaves us with the unenviable task of developing a plan based on the worst-case scenario, which is that none of our classrooms in B nor C-Wings are usable. We have started to develop plans that use every inch of classroom space, repurpose some spaces to use as classrooms, and access spaces off-campus for some groups of students. At this point, it appears that it is doable. However, we should all be prepared for significant changes to the spaces that are available to us, and that everyone will need to make adjustments and sacrifices in order for us to open on-time and in-person in the safest way possible. Given our track record of pulling together when the going is tough, I have no doubt that we will not only make the best of it, but that we will grow even stronger as a school and emerge an even more resilient community.

To be clear, it is also entirely possible that the mitigation efforts will be at least partially successful, and perhaps even wholly successful. If this is the case, it will alleviate the stress of moving classrooms and students and get us even closer to the opening that we would have envisioned for our staff and our students. So, please join me in hoping for the best but preparing for the worst!

Going forward, here are a few logistics to keep in mind:

- We will share the draft of the reopening plan with Liaisons at our retreat on Wednesday, August 14th. If you have questions specific to your department or assignment that might impact a room assignment, please let your liaison know. After we work on the plan with Liaisons, we will share the draft with the rest of the staff via email on August 15th and you can let us know directly with questions and ideas. The school board will discuss and hopefully adopt the plan at their August 20th meeting.
- Once testing is complete in the rooms, our custodial staff can start to move furniture back into classrooms. The earliest this can start is on August 12th for C-Wing and August 19th for B-Wing. Putting our building back together will take a significant amount of time - **please help our custodial staff and technology folks by limiting requests for the next few weeks.** I understand that people will likely want to get into rooms to start organizing and that you will want as much put back together as possible, but please keep in mind that they will be spread extremely thin for the foreseeable future, and we may ultimately need to move things to new locations.
- NCSU Convocation will be August 20th and it will be virtual. For NCUHS and NCCC, this means that we will gather in the Auditorium for the convocation address and activities. There will also be some specific times set aside for us to welcome new staff, get updates on technology, etc. If there is time that is not scheduled, that will be available for department work and/or work to prepare classrooms if they are available.
- In both best-case and worst-case scenarios, teachers will need time to either move back into classrooms or to prepare new spaces for learning. We will use most of the NCUHS professional learning days (August 22nd & 23rd) for this purpose. We will need to set aside some time during the opening week for some very specific discussions that follows-up our work from the end of last year, primarily on how we best support students to become more engaged. As we get closer to that time, we will send out a draft schedule and agenda.
- The school board has once again indicated a willingness to postpone school opening if we are not ready. This decision will be based largely on when we actually get the results back as well as how well the work progresses to get the furniture back into classrooms.

So, I know that is a lot of information to absorb. I've had the chance to sit with all of this for a couple weeks now, and have lost a lot of sleep over the uncertainty of our opening. Aside from the obvious impact to our students and staff if we open without access to our classrooms, perhaps the most disappointing aspect to all of this is the possibility that we will lose the momentum that we gained by the end of last year. I hope you can recall the difficult but productive conversations that we had about grading, attendance, AIE block, and general student engagement levels. These are the conversations that drive school improvement and we began to dig

into some incredibly impactful and meaningful work that will ultimately help our students. As we navigate this latest challenge, please keep these conversations in mind, as well as the belief that when we come together as a staff, we will accomplish great things.

I hope you have a wonderful end to the summer, and please let me know with any questions or ideas.

Chris