Austin ISD Reopening Conversation Circles

Feedback Report

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TEACHERS AND STAFF

What do you feel you would need to feel comfortable sending your child(ren) back to school/returning to school/work?

- Testing for COVID-19 prior to returning to campuses.
- Scientifically supported evidence that the Austin community is at a point to go back to large gatherings without high risk of subjecting teachers and students to infection.
- Strong preventative plan rather than reactive - the ripple effect once a student or teacher is infected will be nearly impossible to control.
- Training and clear expectations (teachers, staff, students and families) on managing/ accounting for safety measures and attendance/grading.
  - Social distancing, Personal Protective Equipment, sanitization, temperature monitoring
  - Effective means for infected students to continue learning in quarantine.
    - Video call into class meeting - not learning/managing lessons alone.
    - Regional quarantine learning spaces (rented/donated open spaces off campus) for asymptomatic/exposed students, so parents can continue working.
  - Renewed list of long-term substitutes, willing to work with teachers in quarantine - guide lessons, not give busy work.
- Physical/emotional support so teachers can educate, not only be a daycare provider
  - PreK-elementary: Extra staff to help manage cleaning toys/materials/work tables, bathroom/hand washing assistance, and provide meal and mental breaks - entire day with students is not sustainable long-term.
  - All levels: student access to counseling and/or calm/reset spaces.
- Equitable services/attention tailored to each campus situation/student’s need - The exact same measures will not be appropriate at every school.
  - Students/teachers that need to lip read would need a clear shield, mouth-covering mask will not work.
  - Account for higher/lower cases per area of the city.

If the district returns to distance learning, what would you need to be successful?

- Devices and Wifi
  - Chromebooks for any child expected to participate online - phones and/or multiple kids sharing one device is not workable.
  - In-home access to wifi - expecting students to consistently travel to wifi is not workable.
- Accountability - many students’ participation lowered or stopped when they realized there was no real accountability in the spring.
  - Need grading and attendance policy as close to physically being together for school as possible.
- Document cameras
- Parent/Teacher training
  - Platforms (seesaw, BLEND, Zoom) - how to access, load/find resources, review/submit work, give/get feedback.
- Consistency - too many options, passwords, systems to navigate).
  - Basic device operation and wifi troubleshooting.
  - Virtual communication best practices/expectations.
  - Online predators - what to avoid, how to manage and report.
  - Parent relations or “Customer Service” mindset
    - Avoid highlighting what parents have not done or done wrong.
    - Offer parents encouragement and reassurance.
    - Parent wellbeing impacts the learner.

- Age appropriate student:teacher and student:student work
  - Synchronized classes
  - Break out rooms - differentiated small groups for working with peers with the teacher working for a time with each group.

- Sufficient time to learn and practice utilizing programs and lesson delivery before school starts - with compensation.
- Building use to film lessons, store and access resources, foster work-life balance - not overwhelming home with teaching materials.
- If packets are still used as supplemental material, they should be equivalent and aligned with online lessons as means for alternative evidence of mastery - useful not busy work.
- Workable expectations for teachers that are parents - “Buddy System” pairs or small groups of parent teachers dividing work in a way that ensures all responsibilities are managed.
- Those of us who have multiple preps could use help creating BLEND courses - It’s an immense amount of time.

What is something you were hoping to learn or discuss today that hasn’t come up yet?
- The district needs to be transparent regarding a reduction in force/lay-offs and how administration decides who goes and who stays.
- We need to reconsider the funding formula at this time. It does not make sense right now.
- We really need to be with students. Aside from missing them, we are a collective of years of experience being able to first-hand teach and observe our learners. How can we do our jobs with integrity when we do not feel confident in what or how we are educating?
- BLEND is not effective for middle school. Google classroom is much more user-friendly.

Key Questions
- Health and Safety Protocols
  - What will be done to keep teachers safe if they teach students 3-5 years of age?
  - Are there any medical professionals on the Task Force?
  - What will happen if someone (staff/student) at a school has a confirmed case of COVID once we reopen? Will the school close?
  - How often will students/faculty/staff be tested?
  - What type of protective gear will the district provide to staff? Will the district provide scrubs that staff can take home and wash?
  - Will there be covid testing for teachers/students?
  - How will teachers access their materials currently locked at home campuses?
○ How would we be able to trace who gets sick at the school?
○ Is there a plan in place for classrooms that don’t have windows?
○ Will we have a full-time nursing staff at each school?
○ What happens if a student refuses to wear a mask? How do we plan to reinforce that?
○ How do we avoid the “cover-ups” where parents give their child Tylenol and send them on their way? We know parents have to go to work.
○ Can masks please be required of all grade levels?
○ Will it be possible to have masks that we can wash or clean instead of constantly throwing away thousands of plastic or disposable masks?
○ If students go home sick, are they required to receive a COVID test?
○ Will there be a room or somewhere to “quarantine” those on a campus who become sick at school?
○ What will we do if students need to go home sick, but parents do not come pick them up in a timely manner?
○ Is there a threshold of number of cases that must be going down or up for the district to decide to go 100% distance learning?
○ How will the district find or ascertain previous health concerns of staff and students?
○ If we’re leaving doors and windows open, are we revising our measures on intruder safety?

● HR

○ What is the plan for staff or students with autoimmune conditions or those who live in a home with people who are high-risk?
○ Will the sick time policy be adjusted?
○ Will the district offer early retirement for teachers that do not feel safe about returning to school?
○ Will teachers have extra paid planning days to prepare for both virtual and brick and mortar teaching?
○ Could teachers have time to communicate with 2020-2021 students one on one to build relationships and check on technology. Could this be before August 18th with teachers getting extra pay?
○ Will teachers have the choice to teach in class or to keep their class online?
○ Is the district covering the cost (medical treatment, paid leave, etc.) of the teachers who get sick?
○ Are special areas teachers secure in their jobs?
○ Will the district have a conflict of interest statement for teachers if they want to teach /tutor on the side for money?
○ Is AISD recruiting substitute teachers and nurses now given that we’ll need more of both next year?
○ By what date are teachers required to sign their contracts for Fall 2020?
○ What is the plan for building a sufficient pool of substitutes?
○ When and how will you decide what the traveling teachers will do to keep everyone safe?
- What is the plan for school office staff? Will they all be on campus at the same time, or will the district consider alternatives, possibly some work from home?
- How will teachers who teach more than 150 students provide instruction for all their students?
- What will happen if a sub doesn’t show up? Will we have to split classes? That will go over the 25% of students in the room.

**Instruction/Accountability**
- Can the district set up basic online programs to cover the TEKS for each subject.
- Are the needs of Pre-K and Kinder being considered separately?
- Can the district come up with a plan so that teachers can still meet their students even if we go straight to distance learning? This is needed to build trust or we cannot expect them to participate fully or at all.
- Do we anticipate the STAAR test being administered this coming year?
- How will accountability increase to help ensure students engage in remote learning opportunities?
- What is the district going to do about students that do not participate in online or in person instruction in the fall?
- How can we advocate for a break in testing accountability this coming year?
- Will AISD hold high school kids more accountable when it comes to AP testing?
- Will the district be providing a new Scope and Sequence for curriculum based on the new teaching model?
- How will the district address social learning for children? How are kiddos doing during this time of isolation?
- How will CTE be managed in an online or blended environment?
- Can Fine Arts (and other electives) develop some bare-bones online BLEND courses that we can modify?
- How will attendance be handled in regards to COVID-related absences?

**Scheduling**
- How will the district balance schedules for teachers with children?
- Will students stay with the same teacher all day? What will happen with staff such as reading specialists who typically see several groups of students each day?
- Will each school be able to decide on an instructional learning model or will it be district wide?
- If it is blended with both in person and online learning, will there be different teachers for each platform? And not teachers doing both?
- Is the district considering more outdoor classrooms?
- What will student lunch look like? Will they be in the classroom all day? Will we be provided planning time?
- How will we support single parent teachers that have school aged children.
- How will we be able to do our planning and duty free time if the kids are remaining in our rooms?
- Do smaller groups in a classroom mean we will have to teach our class twice?
- Will there be district wide recommended scheduling for synchronous and asynchronous time expectations?

**Planning/Communication**
• What is the target date to inform staff and families how the district will move forward?
• Will teachers be able to be part of additional workgroups this summer as we drill deeper into planning?
• Is the district planning a grass-roots, multi-lingual public relations campaign to inform stakeholders of what distance learning will/should look like and embed accountability standards to encourage an increase in student participation?
• How will we support the transition for families who have recently immigrated?
• When will a decision be made regarding participation in UIL?

• Resources
• Is the district still planning to purchase iPads for primary students in the fall? What about hotspots?
• Will the district provide more manipulatives/centers materials for primary classrooms so students don’t share materials?
• Will the district commit to purchase online learning programs for each school subject? We are in triage mode, so we need to make sure we are getting the TEKS met.
• Blend is not easy to use. Has Google Classroom been considered?
• When will funds be available to spend?
• If we are assigned at home with a distance learning model, can we unlock our school activity/campus funds? The spring semester got EXPENSIVE for me and many teachers on my campus.
• Will reimbursement for home office purchases be offered?
• Will there be instructions for troubleshooting district-issued hot spots? We had several students with problems and no info to help.
• What is the school district going to do to balance out the budget?
• Can AISD provide ergonomic chairs for staff to use in their homes?
• Will AISD staff childcare centers still be available this school year?

Have y’all thought about…

• Health and Safety Protocols
• What the district will do about families that opt out of the vaccine once there is one?
• Aligning the reopening plan with the Austin Public Health risk-based guidelines? Since we are currently in phase 4, would the district even consider reopening with the risks as high as it currently is?
• Providing antibody tests?
• The protocol if a student/parent/staff refuses covid screening/testing?
• Opening up the schools that were closed to spread students out?
• Teachers rotating instead of students?

• Planning
• Having families decide if they want to do full virtual learning 9 weeks at a time so we’re looking at numbers for a 9 week period, giving us more options?
• Coordinating schedules with surrounding districts?
• Individual campuses hosting conversation circles like these?
o Studying other school systems in various parts of the world that are restarting
  schooling and looking for what is and what is not successful?
  o Concentrating all resources to distance learning until a vaccine is available?

● Scheduling
  o Using libraries/gyms/cafeterias to host classrooms in a larger space with social
distancing?
  o Going to a four day school week to give teachers more planning time?
  o Staggering the start and end of the day to decrease the population at any given
time?

● Staffing
  o Providing every campus with a facilitator (teacher or TA) so that teachers from the
campus can take their children to work with them and have someone to help with
their online learning?
  o Hiring more staff or shifting the responsibilities of staff so each teacher is
responsible for fewer students?

● Instruction/Accountability
  o Using “standards-based grading,” which could allow each grade to be based on
“power skills/TEKS?”
PARENTS/FAMILIES

What do you feel you would need to feel comfortable sending your child(ren) back to school/returning to school/ work?

- A plan that allows students and staff to be both in school or working/learning remotely.
  - Fear that resistance to a plan may lead to no integrity for the measures or limited learning due to distraction caused by safety protocols.
  - The option of learning from home for those who are immuno-compromised or have been exposed and need to quarantine.
  - District provided space with higher safety measures for students that need to be quarantined and have no supervision at home i.e. asymptomatic, minor symptoms, have been exposed.
- The district should support “closing the gap” by creating equal learning opportunities for students, regardless of parents’ ability to stay home.
- Multiple prepared plans shared before the school year begins, so we can all be ready to adjust for however the situation changes.
- Modified attendance policy
  - District understanding that children’s education is only one part of a family’s commitments and responsibilities.
  - Fewer days and hours on campus.
  - Independent/small group practice at home online with teachers.
  - Expectations need to be workable around parent work and sibling schedules.
- AISD consultation with scientists and mental health professionals
  - Physical and mental wellbeing equally accounted for.
  - Conditions where children are safe, confident, and happy to be at school.
  - Quality of education worth the risk of physical gathering.
- Health and Safety Protocols
  - Testing prior to coming back on campus.
  - Temperature checks.
  - Sanitization management.
  - Nurse available at every campus.
  - Rapid testing onsite - results within 15-minutes.
  - Sanitation stations accessible in every section of a school, so as not to go through doors
  - Building access only for students and staff, children meet parents outside
- Vaccine
- Plenty of notice for closure to plan child care accordingly.
- Transparent and frequent communication.
- Students and all staff committed to reporting travel and health threatening contact and doing their part to responsibly stop excessive spread.
- Full-time assistance for teachers of younger children.
  - A ratio 1:10 for prek-3rd graders
  - Ensure teachers are available to children with at least one other adult who is free to manage cleaning.
• Outdoor learning
• English language learners and their teachers will need a clear shield or some way to see mouths and faces - learning English requires seeing the mouth move and observing facial expressions.

If the district returns to distance learning, what would you need to be successful?
• Technology for all grade levels, even for the younger students' so parents can access lessons and ideas. If the student is registered and expected to be taught by the school, they must have access to school resources.
• Consistent time to be “in” school. District sets hours to be logged on and available for learning.
• Student connection to teachers consistently
  o If not consistent live lessons, at least consistent check-ins for questions/feedback.
  o Live 1:1 with student and teacher at least once a week, and as needed if clarifying questions cannot be answered in written communication (for older students).
  o Face to face interaction of some sort at the beginning of the year - create bonds for students to feel comfortable online with their new teacher.

What is something you were hoping to learn or discuss today that hasn’t yet come up?
• Understanding the plan for specific programs like dual language.
• Fine arts and extracurriculars - these are not second or less important than academics. They are some students’ career paths, and/or access to higher education.

Key Questions
• Health and Safety Protocols
  o Will we have consistent healthcare at every campus daily?
  o Will there be testing on site at each school?
  o Are there any medical, public health experts or nurses from the districts on the taskforce?
  o What happens if a student or their family member has a health vulnerability?
  o For children with asthma who have difficulty wearing a mask for long periods, how will that be handled in a physical classroom with social distancing?
• Planning
  o What specific local guidelines is the district waiting on to help make a final decision?
  o Does AISD have a date by which it is hoping to have a tentative plan for next school year?
• Instruction/Accountability
  o What will grading look like next year?
  o How will in class look different for students in early childhood compared to other grades? Social interaction and hands on play are important for the early years but with health precautions this will be very difficult to achieve.
  o How is the district ensuring support for English language learners and for those in dual language programs?
- How will blended/distance learning be monitored to know if what's planned is actually taking place?
- Will there be different formats considered for the different age group or will all those who attend public school do the same thing?
- What extra measures will be considered to reach out to families in schools that are considered “low performing” to try to prevent any achievement gaps from widening during this pandemic.
- For parents who choose to keep kids home in the fall (whether because of medical issues or otherwise), what actual instruction (not VLOs) will be offered? Will there be a mechanism for kids at home to receive Live-streamed instruction?
- Will schools do any outreach to students over the summer to foster continued connection?

**Choice**
- Have you polled teachers and families to know how many would like to return to in person and how many would like to do online?
- How will whatever system is put in place address the vast differences in access to resources in Austin? A one size fits all solution will leave many children behind.
- If AISD plans to open school, would parents have a choice to opt out of physical presence and for students to virtually connect with their class?

**Resources**
- Will there be after school care for working families?
- How is state funding that is based on weighted average daily attendance calculated when some or all students are engaged but not in the school building?
- Will parents be financially compensated if they lose their jobs to stay home with kids?

**Have y’all thought about…**
- Facilitating focused discussion or info sessions for the different age groups since at-home learning experience has been different depending on grade level?
- Offering day and evening sessions at campuses, which could fit with some families’ schedules?
- Providing a live feed of the classroom to students who are learning from home?
- Staff staying with the same group and teaching them for this next grade?
- Moving permanently to a year-round calendar?
- Adjusting attendance policy?
- Having students stay in one classroom all day while teachers rotate like they do in Latin America?
STUDENTS

What do you feel you would need to feel comfortable returning to school?
- Agreement from the CDC that it is safe for us to get together.
- Safety measures must be clear cut and required by all, instead of just a suggestion.
- Proof of testing before anyone is allowed back into school
- Fewer kids in the building at once.
- A schedule along with a plan for how to move around school, so no mistakes are made.
- Extra teachers (monitors) on the bus, because kids don’t always listen to the bus driver, and he/she can’t get up to correct anyone.

If the district returns to distance learning, what would you need to be successful?
- Teachers that know how to use all the technology required to make distant learning work.
- Contact with my teacher(s).
- Filmed and/or live lessons - as opposed to reviewing content.
- Small group work with break out rooms on zoom because we also learn from each other.
- More accountability. Most of the work was too easy.
- Consistent expectations/structure with teachers and principals in alignment.
- Assurance all content on BLEND is accessible - many videos ended up being blocked online.
- Extracurriculars for movement, variation, and fun learning.

What is something you were hoping to learn or discuss today that hasn’t yet come up?
- We had good experiences with flipped lessons in middle school math classes and various other classes over the years. That coupled with office hours or smaller breakout work sessions might be helpful.

Key Questions:
- What are some ideas of how extracurriculars such as dance team will be handled?
- When will we receive guidance from individual campuses on majors and fulfilling requirements, especially those that typically require on-site work?

Have y’all thought about…
- Hosting outdoor meet and greets with social distancing and masks at the start of the year?
- Using Zoom breakout rooms to get to know students in our classes?
- Staggered attendance: half the kids in the morning, everyone eats lunch away from school, and the other half attends in the afternoon.
SPECIAL EDUCATION FOCUS

What do you feel you would need to feel comfortable sending your child(ren) back to school/returning to school/ work?

- Consistent, clear communication.
- Plenty of outdoor activities.
- Strict, specific health guidelines
  - Aides must be tested - many students need physical assistance eliminating distance.

If the district returns to distance learning, what would you need to be successful?

- Would need the district to offer more actual Zoom lessons that fill up most of the day.
- Devices for all grade levels so students are not having to share devices with parents.
- There needs to be clear guidelines on how/what instruction the teacher should provide for a blind student who is unable to access video learning like the rest of the class.
- Teacher in-home visits to homes following social distancing measures.
- Teachers need more training to modify the distance learning to meet the needs of kids with special needs to follow their IEP.
- Ongoing tech support for families to troubleshoot problems with devices or learn to use different platforms.

What is something you were hoping to learn or discuss today that hasn’t yet come up?

- Concerned about IDEA compliance.
- Social skills are a challenge that are difficult to gain through Zoom. Many students were resistant to interacting via Zoom.
- Hopefully it’ll be much different going forward. What we just experienced was crisis schooling at the drop of a hat. We have time and opportunity to plan improved learning opportunities.
- We need to get back on track with dyslexia interventions.
- Worry about whether the benefits of social distancing preventing COVID spread outweigh the risk of the impact on academic achievement, social skill development and overall child development and emotional well-being.
- We need to prepare for legal ramifications when IEPs are not met.

Key Questions:

- Health and Safety Protocols
  - If students with special needs are not required to wear masks, will the district provide staff working with them high grade protective equipment and masks?
  - Will immunocompromised families have the option of full-time distance learning?
  - Will schools allow those students with antibodies in? Will there be a private questionnaire about that?
  - What safe practices will be implemented on bus routes?
  - How will teachers enforce the use of masks? Will there be consequences for those who do not?
Will exceptions to wearing a mask be made for Special Education students or students with asthma?
○ How will staff that do have to have physical contact with students be kept safe?

○ Planning/Communication
○ What criteria will AISD follow to decide whether schools should re-open or not?
○ How are we marketing registration and making the registration process easier?
○ What is going to happen to staff who have SAMA certificates that expire in the fall?

○ Prioritizing students for in-person instruction
○ If schools only open at 25%, how will students be selected to attend? What equity will be ensured during the process?
○ How did the district come to the decision to prioritize General Education Pre-k kids returning to in-person over the summer over SPED Pre-k?
○ Will students still get 1:1 instruction if in-person instruction is reduced?
○ Will students receiving Special Education Services get the first option to return to in-person learning?
○ Will students receiving Special Education services be allotted more “in-person” time?

○ Instruction/Programming
○ Will the continuity plans the district had us sign remain in place or will our IEP be followed again so our kids can get their much needed services?
○ How will programs like Go-Project and other transition services be offered?
○ Will there be online programming for GT?
○ How will the district provide Special Education services at the high school level?
○ Have the legal requirements for students receiving Special Education services been adjusted for online learning?
○ Will after school programs be offered like tutoring, EAC, Prime Time, ACE, etc.? How many students will be allowed to go?
○ When will we be contacted by our Special Education coordinators?
○ What are the creative solutions being discussed for children who need one-on-one aides to help access the curriculum in the distance learning environment?

○ Resources
○ Will there be reimbursements for families who have to hire tutors for their students?
○ With AISD police not patrolling can these monies be moved around?
○ Will child care providers be able to operate on the elementary school campuses? If not, what are you doing for working parents and parents who think it is more unsafe to leave kids home than to send them to school under any circumstances?

Have y’all thought about...

○ Scheduling
○ Adding Saturday to the regular school week?
○ Offering classes into the evening?
○ Shifting “summer break” to “winter break” to help reduce contact with others during the influenza season and to prepare for the second wave of the pandemic?
Extending the school year to keep students from experiencing a drastic summer slide?

Having increased distance learning for high school students and then elementary aged children can utilize high schools as extra space for additional classes?

Holding classes outdoors as much as possible?

**Choice**

Providing a stipend to families that choose or need to opt for at-home learning since they will not be using district services?

Giving families the option to return to in-person or not to see if most families can have the education model of their choice?

Having some kind of customization where if your child can succeed academically with online learning, but needs person-to person interaction for social deficits, certain classes (like SCORES) could be prioritized for on-site school?

Having campuses for families who don’t want to or cannot wear masks? The health professionals and scientists all view masks as essential. Some parents want their children in masks and to be around others who are masked. Some campuses have multiple entrances where less restrictive measures could be in place.

**Resources**

Using the first 2 weeks to help our struggling students learn more about online learning, social distancing, social skills to use in the online learning environment?

Schools and insurance companies working together? We are putting much on our SpEd teachers to make sure students get their needed services.

Providing training for students on online safety.

Providing childcare for parents and staff who have to go back to work and cannot afford childcare if students are not in school?

Training general education teachers in universal design to accommodate all learners in online learning?

Providing more SpEd focused conversation circles as the situation develops?
OPTIMISTIC CLOSURE
Share with us an unexpected or joyous learning moment from your distance learning experience.

Teachers/Staff

- I really did get closer with my students and their families. Many kids asked about my summer plans at the end of the year, and parents are sending me family pictures of what they’re up to. It feels like we care about each other more than I’ve had with students and families in years.
- Students could choose to give a tour of their homes, and one got to show everyone her family’s bees!
- One of my nonverbal students expressed excitement to be on a Zoom call with me, and he had never shown any sort of joy for me in the past. I didn’t even think he was engaged during our calls, and it made me feel really good to know he was connecting and happy.
- I am at a Title I middle school, and I was so impressed with the student work teachers were sharing at our online faculty meetings. Not all kids have a lot of parental support at home, and they were so engaged, reaching out to us when they needed. I was very surprised - that was great.
- Starting classes later was nice!
- I think many kids worked better and had more participation with the online dynamic.
- The Navarro community really showed up like never before.
- Some of my Special Education students would get overwhelmed in class, and they really “came alive” with the online learning.
- I did contactless drop off, and delivered books with little notes for my students at their doors. I got to really get a better sense of where my kids are coming from, that was good for me, too.
- I got to spend much more one-on-one time with my students that speak English as a second language, without anyone interrupting them.
- It was an unexpected pleasure not doing the STAAR.
- It was so nice to see everyone’s homes, I really felt like I got to know everyone better.
- It was sweet how much my kids liked seeing me on the screen. I don’t even like having my picture taken, but they loved it!
- My kids posted video work on FlipGrip, and I got to see a side of them I never saw in class! Even the shy ones came out of their shells!
- One of my little boys with parents I had almost no communication with thrived with online learning. He turned in every assignment and his parents who were normally very quiet were extra communicative.

Parents/Families

- Very pleasantly surprised. My daughter has attention difficulties. She amazingly did almost better with online learning, maybe because of lack of distraction. She became very independent and really stepped up to the plate. She matured over the course of two days.
- I’ve enjoyed my kids, we’ve planted a garden.
• My child really likes making little videos. He loves that he could move around and didn’t have to be sitting still in his desk the whole time. I like that we could practice and learn lots of new technology skills.
• The printed packets the distinct sent in English and Spanish were great.
• PE was great, they even had Yoga and the curriculum was very fun and active.
• We had fun with art and music.
• I was with my daughter working together. We even had ZUMBA together.
• The Guitar class was great because my child learned how to play Las Mañanitas. We learned English, technology and other things by helping our children.
• I liked that we really got to know the teacher more, and it did make me happy knowing I was really a part of what my kid was learning. Some of it was new to me, so we were learning together.
• The entire band class doing a zoom performance, and slideshow of their year together was really special.