

## **Questions and Answers from the Open Panel Discussion: COVID-19 in our Community September 30, 2021**

Following are some of the questions posted by community members during the panel discussion on September 30. Answers are provided by the student services department of the Douglas County School System.

**When there is high transmission in the community, isn't it considered best practice, and the CDC's recommendation, for individuals who have had direct contact with a positive individual to quarantine? Some DC schools are allowing families the option to quarantine their children.**

When a staff member or student is identified as a close/direct contact to someone who tests positive for COVID-19, they are required to quarantine for the recommended period of time. The only exception is when the individual who is identified as a close/direct contact has been fully vaccinated and has no COVID-19 symptoms, they will not be required to quarantine.

**If the masks work and most of the children sent to school every day are not wearing N95, why do we still have the close contact children being sent home?**

The DCSS protocol is that students who are identified as close/direct contacts to someone who tests positive for COVID-19 quarantine for the recommended period of time. Students who properly wear their masks who are more than 3 feet of someone who tests positive will not be identified as a close/direct contact in the school setting.

**My grand children attend Chapel Hill Elementary. The parents in support of students wearing masks send their kids to school with the assumption and hope that their child is encouraged to keep the mask on at all times except lunch time. Why are the schools allowed and encouraging students to give the students "mask breaks" during the school time?**

Schools are encouraged to allow students breaks from their mask if needed for a brief period of time. The break should be given when students are outside or when they can physically distance themselves from others.

**Why are the rates in Douglas County so much higher than Cobb County if the masks are working?**

Without knowing which numbers specifically you are referencing, it is difficult to respond to this question.

### **What are you doing at the BOE for mask?**

All employees are required to wear a mask while in a DCSS facility to include the Central Office Board of Education.

### **Why was the BOE the highest % from last week?**

Percentages are figured for all DCSS facilities unless the number of employees/cases is too few to report. Last week the Central Office did have the highest percentage of cases for the district. However, there were no connections to the cases.

### **Why was this meeting blocked to 100, the email stated 1000?**

The meeting was set up to accommodate up to 1,000 participants. Unfortunately at the beginning of the meeting, the setting to allow up to 1,000 participants was not functioning properly. However, it was resolved and participants were allowed to enter the ZOOM call upon request.

### **There is a clear shortage of school system nurses handling protocol for COVID cases. This shortage has resulted in my family receiving erroneous information regarding protocol for specific cases, sending health information to the wrong staff and/or family members that have been exposed by direct contact or tested positive. How can this issue be addressed?**

The increase in the number of close/direct contacts and positive cases at the beginning of the school year did require the DCSS to increase the number of individuals to assist with COVID reporting, contact tracing, and return to school/work strategies. Upon notification of situations where conflicting information was given to families, we have worked diligently to clear up any confusion or misinformation. We work tirelessly to improve our practices and service to our families.

### **What are the numbers we are trying to reach to get rid of the mask mandate? What percentage in Douglas County will remove the mask? What case rate/percentage is the goal?**

While we are working to provide some choice in wearing masks, the numbers remain too high in our community to lift the mask mandate. Any decision made as it pertains to the mask mandate will be communicated via all DCSS media outlets.

### **Regarding close contact exposure...when a child has been identified as having direct exposure in the school why aren't they immediately quarantined at school until a decision is made regarding sending them home? (Chapel Hill Elementary)**

DCSS protocol is that as soon as schools are notified that a student has been identified as a close/direct contact, they place the student in an isolation room and immediately contact the parent to come and get their child from school.

**At New Manchester High School at a time when universal precautions and high level cleanliness and thorough sanitizing should be implemented, the school is absolutely filthy and unsanitary. It is unrealistic for only 2 custodians to manage this. How can this issue be addressed**

Concerns for specific schools should be directed to the school principal. However, your concern has been noted and will be addressed.

**What is the reason and rationale for not having some form of virtual classroom available for students that are quarantined at home due to either exposure or testing positive? At Chapel Hill Elementary, a designated teacher is available only 1 hour per day to address all academic questions or challenges for students under home quarantine. This current strategy hinders a child's ability to reach and or maintain his or her full potential academically.**

While the DCSS is not offering live instruction for face-to-face students who have to learn from home due to COVID, schools are utilizing Google Classroom and providing other resources to ensure the student has the best opportunity to keep up academically for that period of time they are home.

**Ms. Nail, why send close contacts home if the masks are working?**

Current DCSS protocol is for students identified as close/direct contacts to quarantine at home for the required period of time. Students who properly wear their masks who are more than 3 feet of someone who tests positive will not be identified as a close/direct contact in the school setting. Fortunately, very few students are being identified as close/direct contacts in the school setting, largely in part to students properly wearing masks.

**The contact tracers have no idea what's going on. I have four children that were all quarantined at the same time. Based on when they processed the paperwork and sent me an email determined when my child could return to school. 10/1 for some children 10/4 for another. I had three contact tracers call me and when I told them they had already called they were able to see in the system that I had already answered the questions.**

We apologize for this experience. As stated earlier, we work tirelessly to improve our practices and service to our families.

**If the masks work, why is the percentage in Douglas County schools so much higher than the surrounding counties that don't require masks?**

Without knowing which numbers specifically you are referencing, it is difficult to respond to this question.

**Are students in classes with those in their class that have Covid contacted and told to quarantine?**

Contact tracing occurs for all positive cases. Students who are identified as close/direct contacts to the positive case, will be required to quarantine. Other students in the class who are not close/direct contacts will be given a low risk letter letting them know someone in their class has tested positive.

**Are you excluding children who have symptoms of COVID and asking them to be tested prior to returning to school? Also families need to understand that if there is positive person in their household, then their children need to stay home.**

Students who have symptoms of COVID are not required to test. However, we ask them to remain home until they are symptom free (without medication) for 24 hours. Parents/guardians are instructed to keep children home if someone in their household is COVID positive. The exception to that is individuals who are fully vaccinated with no symptoms do not have to quarantine.

**So if a physician exempts a child from wearing a mask - will you honor it?**

Instances where students whose doctor recommends they not wear a mask are handled on a case by case basis.

**What about children who have already tested positive for Covid and have natural immunity. Can they attend school without a mask? Are they counted as “vaccinated” due to their immunity?**

At this time masks are required for all individuals inside DCSS facilities.

**What about the concerns of the families that don't want their children wearing masks?**

At this time masks are required for all individuals inside DCSS facilities.

**I thought North said MULTIPLE mask breaks would be given to our children! Is that not true?!?**

Current DCSS protocols allow students to take breaks from their masks. Schools are encouraged to allow students breaks from their mask if needed for a brief period of time. The break should be given when students are outside or when they can physically distance themselves from others.

**Ms. Nail - please provide documentation that the cloth mask is beneficial - aka efficacy.**

Pediatric COVID-19 Cases in Counties With and Without School Mask Requirements — United States, July 1–September 4, 2021 | MMWR

Association Between K–12 School Mask Policies and School-Associated COVID-19 Outbreaks — Maricopa and Pima Counties, Arizona, July–August 2021 | MMWR