

August 26, 2021

Dear Parents and Guardians,

I would once again like to express my appreciation for our outstanding teachers, administrators and other school personnel who are doing a remarkable job with keeping our students safe. In addition to their regular demanding job of providing the best possible education for our students, school personnel are also tasked with ensuring students are wearing masks, encouraging good hygiene and following protocol for reporting positive COVID cases. All of these measures are helping to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 in our schools.

From day one, our goal has been to keep our schools open and our students in the classroom five days a week for the 2021-2022 school year. We have revised the original *Learning by Design* document to outline three levels of community spread of COVID and the mask guidance for each level. The *Learning by Design* document also outlines our reporting procedures, along with protocols for quarantine and isolation.

I am often asked what data determines the levels of spread. We are using the same numbers we used last year, and we have shared those numbers in the updated plan. We are currently at a high spread level, and masks are mandated. I had hoped that we could change our mask mandate after Labor Day, but we know now that this will not happen with the numbers trending as they are. However, I remain optimistic that our case numbers and positive rate will decrease at some point this year so that masks become recommended or optional.

To access the Learning by Design document, please click [here](#) or go to the district website and click the 21-22 School Year tab. You will see a link to the document on the right side of the page.

We are also providing additional data for you on a weekly basis regarding the percent of positive cases at our schools. In addition to the number of cases, you will see the percentage of the total school population that represents. The percentage gives some context to the number of cases. While 28 cases in one school may sound like a lot, the percentage may not be significant because of the large number of students and staff in that location. You may access this information by going to the 21-22 School Year tab on the homepage of the district website, or you may click [here](#).

We have hired four additional employees to assist with our contact tracing process. The contact tracers, along with our school administrators, are working diligently to follow protocol when we have a positive COVID case at a school or office location. It can be a daunting task, but we are determined to do everything we can to keep our students and staff safe and our schools open for in-person learning. We want to be as transparent as possible about the status of COVID in our schools, because I believe that the more you, our parents, know and understand, the better you can help us as we navigate the 2021-2022 school year.

Some parents have been concerned because procedures at one school may look different from procedures at another school. Principals know their schools better than anyone, and they do have some discretion with COVID protocols. However, all schools should use the following guidance:

- Masks are mandatory at this time.

- Schools must provide times during the day for students to have a break from the mask.
- Masks are not mandatory outside or at recess.
- Even though mask breaks are provided, students may elect to keep their masks on at all times.

I am appreciative of the feedback from our parents and community through emails, phone calls and comments at Board of Education meetings. Much about COVID is divisive, but we remain focused on doing what we can to mitigate the spread and keep our schools open. As always, I appreciate your support as we work to make the best decisions for our students, staff and families.

Sincerely,

Trent North, Superintendent