



November 19, 2020

Prairie Families and Staff:

Please read this entire update there are two important items to share:

1. Intentions and considerations for learning model after return from Thanksgiving Break
2. Description of changes to “close contact” definitions in Linn County and potential impacts

Intentions and considerations for learning model after return from Thanksgiving break

Based on trend data for community infection; reported District infection/quarantine; “close contact guidance;” and out of desire to allow time for families to plan, we are communicating the following intended action and outlining a metric for decision-making beyond Thanksgiving Break.

If the community rate of infection on November 25, 2020, remains at or above 20% for Linn County, regardless of trend in the weeks preceding, the District will file a waiver to extend online learning for the period of November 30 through as late as December 14. We will also continue to examine rates of isolation and quarantine of students and staff and other public factors in this decision, regardless of the 14-day rate.

The decision to remain online (at home) or return on November 30th in Hybrid will be announced November 25, 2020. If continuing online, we will also announce the length of this intended continuation on the 25th.

Based on current trends in community spread, we predict that a number of students and families will report illness and exposure on November 30th. The rate prior to that potential surge is key in determining its impact. Moving classrooms and schools into closure after just returning to in-person learning, and doing so with very limited advanced notice, will be problematic for families and students.

While factors related to safety and stability do not go away below 20%, it was at this rate that we saw a tipping point for District Operations and infection rates in the weeks preceding our current move to online. We remain confident in the ability of the every-other-day hybrid model to allow for in-person instruction, mitigation efforts and District operational needs.

Description of changes to “close contact” definitions in Linn County and potential impacts

On November 12, Linn County Public Health released updated guidance for contact tracing and quarantine related to the definition of “Close Contact.” While this updated local guidance is a departure from the Iowa Department of Public Health, Linn County Health is aligning their guidance with CDC recommendations in order to mitigate the currently high rate of community spread. We intend to follow this updated guidance to align with their efforts and because we have been committed throughout the pandemic to follow guidance from local public health officials to the greatest extent possible.

We would like to take a moment to inform families of what the potential results of this change might be as we participate in community-wide efforts to mitigate the spread of COVID-19, now at a critical point in our community.

We continue to be confident that our mitigation strategies and adherence to CDC guidance is creating a safe learning environment for students at school; however, given the magnitude of our current situation locally, we will continue to adhere to LCPH guidance and ask that our parents and community do all that they can to stop the spread of COVID-19 as well.

Close contact is defined by CDC as:

- **Being within 6 feet of someone who has COVID-19 for a total of 15 minutes or more in a 24-hour period, starting from 2 days before illness onset or testing.**
- Living in the same household as a person diagnosed with COVID-19.
- Direct physical contact with the person (hugged or kissed them)
- Exposure to respiratory droplets from a positive individual (sneezed on, coughed on, etc.)

Close contact includes all of the above, regardless of mask use.

Note: Our processes already included bullet points 2-4 above.

We foresee the following potential changes/impacts as we adjust to this updated guidance when we return to any variation of onsite instruction (hybrid or full):

- 1) To maintain our goal to offer safe onsite instruction to the greatest extent possible, we will start making some decisions for online learning on a school-by-school and classroom-by-classroom basis with the goal to keep as many unexposed students as possible onsite.
- 2) Based on the modified definition of close contact for quarantine (cumulative contact over 24 hours for 15 minutes within 6 feet) and the current local rate of infection, the number of quarantined students will likely increase. Based on our analysis of the past six weeks, we anticipate the number of students requiring quarantine based on a school exposure to COVID-19 to increase three times our current rate. But as infections rates decrease, then so should the number of quarantined students.
- 3) Our use of the hybrid as a structure to keep students in school as much as possible will become a more likely option for school operations moving forward based on our District Considerations.
- 4) As quarantines increase, we will need to balance *quality* delivery of instruction with the ability to deliver onsite learning. This means that we will likely need more classrooms and/or schools transition to virtual learning for 2-week time periods after exposure.
- 5) Our ability to inform families of classroom, school, and district closures/modifications to learning models impacting onsite attendance will shorten. We have strived to provide at least one week's notice of changes that will impact our families' childcare and work demands. Because of current local conditions and the increase in the need for students to quarantine, it is possible that we will provide limited notice regarding closures of classrooms, schools, or the district. Families should be prepared for the possibility of next-day closures but we will continue to inform the public of any changes as soon as possible.

What help do we need to mitigate the above factors?

- 1) Do not send your student to school when displaying symptoms OR if any member of the household has tested positive for COVID-19.
- 2) Cooperate with our contact tracing process of the school and public health with understanding and honesty.

- 3) Adhere to CDC guidelines, especially masking and distancing while at home and work and encourage others to do so.
- 4) Stay at home when travel is not necessary.
- 5) Avoid participating in or having your student participate in structured activities that are un-regulated or do not follow the CDC guidelines for masking, sanitization, distancing and contact tracing.
- 6) Make good/safe holiday plans in the interest of public health/safety with the goal of getting students back to school and minimize interruption to learning.

Thank you again for your persistence in reading these updates. Thank you for your continued support of our schools and students.

In Service,

Douglas Wheeler

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Superintendent of Schools