



May 16, 2021

Prairie Families:

I hope this message finds you and your student(s) well as we approach the conclusion of the school year. I am writing today to overview the District's response to recent guidance by the Iowa Department of Public Health (IDPH) related to COVID-19 mitigation strategies in Iowa schools. As has occurred throughout the past 15 months, this guidance continues to change without prior notification requiring quick consideration of impact to school operations.

Like much of the guidance we have strived to follow, this guidance will impact our students, families and staff in various ways and with mixed reactions. Like other communications related to COVID-19, this is a long one. I encourage you to take the time to read the entire document to understand our response on this matter.

While we are still in the pandemic:

- ★ **Our priority during this unprecedented pandemic continues to be the safety of our students and staff. Since the start of the year, every effort has been leveraged to allow safe onsite instruction.**
- ★ **Each and every consideration impacting this priority for safety is carefully considered, including current and changing guidance, incidents of COVID-19 in our community and our student body, and the feasibility of applying mitigation strategies in a school setting.**
- ★ **We make these decisions based on careful consideration of current local, state, and national guidance, not politics, media influence, petition or individual opinion.**

**Last Friday afternoon (May 14), the IDPH released the following updated guidance to schools: [LINK](#). Key changes in this guidance included:**

- Approach COVID-19 like other childhood illnesses (see: [IDPH Common Child Illnesses and Exclusion Criteria for Education and Child Care Settings](#))
- Schools urged to provide parents and students with the option to make their own decision about mask usage (optional masking)
- Asymptomatic children who have been exposed to COVID-19 will no longer be required to quarantine, regardless of mask usage

In January, the College Community School Board made the decision to follow Iowa Department of Public Health Guidance for quarantines which allowed masks as a mitigating factor to mandatory quarantine. This was done to reduce the number of students losing access to school for exposure. This decision made continuing mask mandates at all times critical, this latest guidance impacts the need for continued mandatory masking in all areas at all times.

Due to our mitigation efforts, current conditions related to COVID-19 on campus are favorable, including:

- 71% of staff vaccinated (as of April)
- Vaccines are starting to open up to children 12+
- Our onsite positivity rate has been low - 52 student cases and 12 staff cases in the past three months (February 15 - May 15)
- Weekly positivity average February 15 - May 15 has been less than a quarter of one percent
- In the coming weeks, we will be coordinating with Linn County for an onsite vaccination clinic (more information to come)

We have been consistent in following guidance when that guidance is feasible in school settings. Guidance is not law and under Iowa Code 279, the school has the authority and responsibility to develop rules that allow for the operation of school; however, due to the developing nature of this health emergency we follow guidance to the greatest extent possible.

We have no reason to disagree with this guidance as recommended by health professionals; however, the timing of the guidance does not take into account the complexity of school operations; specifically:

- 1) The vast majority of our student body remains unvaccinated, we do not have records of fully vaccinated 16+ year old students.
- 2) We not only want students to **be** safe at school, we want them to **feel** safe at school. We need to allow students (especially our youngest learners) a period of adjustment and time to interact with teachers and staff on this matter before making a significant change.
- 3) There are 14 school days remaining and our teachers and support staff are intently focused on leveraging every minute of learning in support of students due to the unusual nature of the year. The impact of new procedures and routines on this work needs to be considered and taken into account.
- 4) The ability of students to adjust to new procedures and routines varies depending on the age group.
- 5) A shift of this magnitude will take time for teachers and support staff to adjust to in order to support students. The timing of this announcement does not allow staff to make adjustments or ask questions related to this guidance, should it take effect the next school/work day.
- 6) This shift may necessitate the reallocation and redistribution of PPE across our campus.

Our campus setting further adds to the complexity of applying COVID-19 guidance, especially in the area of transportation.

**As we have consistently done throughout the past 15 months, we will take the time needed to adjust to this guidance. Therefore, we will not make significant adjustments on Monday, May 17.**

**We will proceed with the following plan to respond to this new guidance:**

**The following will continue in full through June 4, 2021**

- We will continue to strongly encourage all people to abide by developing CDC guidance related to masking and mitigation in and outside of school.
- Mitigation strategies such as modified student transitions, seating assignments/tracking, “sanitize in, sanitize out”, classroom arrangements for distancing, enhanced cleaning, lunch mitigation, exclusion of positive individuals for 10 days etc. will continue.
- All students should have a face covering with them while on school grounds during the school day.
- Face coverings will continue to be required on all district transportation (busses and vehicles).
- Policies for visitors not being allowed on campus during the day will remain in place.
- All previously announced mitigation strategies for events beyond the school day, including crowd size and seating arrangements for events occurring prior to the end of the school year will remain in place for on-campus events.

*At this time, we do not have additional information on how current state guidelines will impact off-campus activities like graduation. If there are changes, graduates and their families will be notified. Many mitigation strategies are directed by the venue.*

### **Effective Immediately (May 17, 2021)**

- Students will no longer be required to wear face coverings while outside or engaged in heavy physical activity in large indoor areas like gyms.
- Contact tracing protocols per the new guidance will be followed.
- All CCSD staff will be required to wear face coverings (mask or shield) when interacting with students or the public through at least June 30, regardless of vaccination status, if not interacting with the public, staff are encouraged to follow latest CDC guidance on masking for vaccinated individuals.

### **May 17 - May 19**

- All mask requirements for indoors classrooms and common spaces will continue as we consider available options to respond to the recent IDPH guidance
- **Any changes to indoor masking protocols in alignment with this guidance will be announced no later than May 20 and will take effect no earlier than May 20 and no later than May 24**

### **June 5, 2021 and beyond (subject to change based on updated guidance and local conditions)**

- In response to the May 17 guidance, face coverings will be optional (by individual choice) at College Community Schools for students and visitors
- All CCSD staff will be required to wear face coverings (mask or shield) when interacting with students or the public through at least June 30, regardless of vaccination status, if not interacting with the public, staff are encouraged to follow latest CDC guidance on masking for vaccinated individuals.
- Visitors will be allowed on campus during work hours

Early in the school year, we set expectations and responses for failure to wear a mask. As we continue to adjust, we will not tolerate and quickly address reported shaming/harassment of students (by students or adults) for their masking decisions. Part of the journey to normal must be respect for the choices of others.

On a final note, our school-aged children should be commended for how they have handled the pandemic. The pandemic has taught us all a great deal about ourselves and each other. In spite of significant upheaval during a critical stage of their development, our students have approached this pandemic in a superior manner, displaying understanding, kindness, empathy, persistence and patience. They should be commended and we should take notice.

Thank you for your continued support of the College Community Schools.

In Service,

Doug Wheeler, Ph.D.  
Superintendent