

Dear Palos 118 Families,

This week's status update is below.

- 1. A return to Phase 3 of the Governor's Restore Illinois Plan**  
Suburban Cook County remains in Phase 4, which allows schools to resume in-person instruction. The test positivity rate is 5.7% for our region (Region 10 on 8/3/20). Source: Governor's Office and IDPH
- 2. Outbreaks of confirmed COVID-19 cases in schools**  
Most Illinois schools are scheduled to resume later this month. Source: Palos 118
- 3. Confirmed community spread of the virus**  
There is no confirmed widespread transmission of COVID-19 in the Palos area. Source: IDPH
- 4. Directives from IDPH, ISBE or the Governor's Office**  
There have been no new directives regarding school reopening issued by IDPH, ISBE or the Governor's Office. Source: IDPH, ISBE, Governor's Office
- 5. District 118 Staffing**  
The school district has reached a critical staffing shortage. The school district has the following external vacancies due to resignations, retirements, and leaves of absences.
  - Approximately 50% of substitutes indicated they will not return next year.
  - 1 full-time general education middle school teacher
  - 1 full-time elementary reading specialist
  - 2 long-term elementary general education substitute teachers
  - 3 long-term elementary special education substitute teachers
  - 1 long-term substitute paraprofessional
  - 2 full-time custodians
  - 5 part-time elementary supervisors

In addition, the school district has multiple internal vacancies to be filled by existing staff members. Finally, the Emergency Family Medical Leave Act provides public employees with emergency childcare leave up to 12 weeks if their child's school is closed due to COVID-19. As a result of the growing trend among school districts to offer remote-only instruction to begin the school year, Palos 118 may see additional leave requests once all school districts announce their reopening plans or revise existing reopening plans.

These staffing shortages are out of the school district's control. We are working around the clock to fill these open positions.

- Source: District 118

As I have stated in my previous messages, the school district cannot open schools without adequate staff. **As a result of our current staffing shortage, I may have no choice but to delay the start of school until after Labor Day (September 8). I will brief the Board of Education on this possible delay at its regularly scheduled board meeting on Tuesday, August 11 at 7:00 p.m.** We will once again broadcast the meeting via Zoom so we can accommodate all families and staff members that may wish to attend virtually. As a reminder, our boardroom is limited to 50 individuals. A link to the meeting will be posted to our website on Tuesday.

It is imperative families continue to contemplate multiple childcare options, including the possibility of five days a week care if the school district is forced to delay its opening or open with a remote-only program.

#### **Notification of Group Assignments**

Parents have been notified of their child's group assignment. Students assigned to Group A will attend in-person instruction on Monday and Tuesday. Students assigned to Group B will attend in-person instruction on Thursday and Friday. Due to the size of our school district and the complexity of scheduling, it is impossible to accommodate requests for specific group assignments. I know you may be upset about your child's grouping and I thank you for

your understanding regarding our inability to change group assignments. I wish we could accommodate every family's request for group preferences. Unfortunately, logistics will not allow us to do so.

### **Bus Stops**

As a reminder, students will need their self-certification symptom forms and a face mask to board the school bus each day. I highly encourage parents of elementary school students be at bus stops with their children in the event a child needs to be denied boarding.

If your child WILL NOT be utilizing bus transportation next school year, please email our Transportation Coordinator Mary Meyer at [mmeyer@palos118.org](mailto:mmeyer@palos118.org) and inform her of your decision. You can also call 708-448-4405. In order to assign bus routes with maximum social distancing on buses, we need to have this information **as soon as possible**.

### **Quarantine Procedures**

You may be aware of recent news reports regarding schools in other states that have reopened. Just last night, I watched several reports regarding schools in Georgia, Tennessee and Mississippi that recently reopened for in-person instruction and were forced to initiate quarantines quickly thereafter in response to positive COVID-19 cases in their schools. As you listen to these news reports, I ask that you consider the safety measures these school districts have put in place as they vary from state to state and school district to school district.

Having to initiate a quarantine after we reopen our schools is a very real possibility. A quarantine will be necessary if a student or staff member tests positive for COVID-19. A quarantine may be necessary if a student or staff member exhibits one or more COVID-19 symptoms or has come into close contact with someone who tested positive for COVID-19. Close contact can happen at school, home or in the community. "Close contact" means that the student or staff member was within 6 feet of a person who tested positive for COVID-19 for more than 15 minutes.

Quarantines may include an entire classroom, multiple classrooms and/or individuals coming in close contact. The decision to quarantine will be made by the school district in consultation with the Cook County Department of Public Health and the Illinois Department of Public Health. Quarantines are an effective tool for limiting transmission of COVID-19 in schools. Students that are required to quarantine will be able to continue to learn remotely during their quarantine period, which may last up to 14 calendar days. More information regarding student quarantines can be found on our website at [www.palos118.org/return2020](http://www.palos118.org/return2020).

### **Reopening Schools**

My update next week will contain comprehensive information regarding a range of issues leading up to the start of school. Please continue to review these updates weekly. After reviewing all of the current IDPH data, I remain committed to reopening our schools for in-person instruction. Unfortunately, it is highly likely that a delay until September 8 will be necessary. I know many families will be extremely disappointed and frustrated if we are forced to delay reopening. I share that disappointment and frustration with you. There is nothing I want more than a return to normalcy for our students, staff and our entire community.

Thank you for your continued partnership and understanding as we work together to reopen our schools.

Sincerely,

Dr. Anthony M. Scarsella  
Superintendent of Schools