



Dear Palos 118 Families:

For the past several months, the school district has worked diligently to implement guidance from the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) and Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH) that would allow for the safe return of students and staff to classrooms. Last Tuesday, the Board of Education approved delaying the start of the school year to provide additional time to address a staffing shortage that the school district continues to work diligently to eliminate. With the delay we remained optimistic that we would open with in-person instruction on September 8. Unfortunately, the day after the board meeting we received updated guidance from IDPH that creates additional obstacles for in-person instruction that may force us to begin the school year remotely on September 8.

New IDPH Guidance for Schools

The new IDPH requirements will most likely result in frequent and prolonged disruptions to the learning environment, particularly new requirements regarding school and work exclusions. Specifically, the new guidance includes:

- Excluding students and staff from school who present with **JUST ONE** COVID-19 symptom. Symptoms of COVID-19 are extremely common and include nausea, congestion, cough, fatigue, headache, sore throat and runny nose to name a few.
- Medical evaluation **AND** COVID-19 diagnostic testing for all persons sent home from school with COVID-like symptoms.
- **DOCTORS' NOTES** for students and staff returning to school with an alternative diagnosis after experiencing COVID-like symptoms.
- **"RELEASE FROM ISOLATION"** letters issued by the Cook County Department of Public Health for all students returning to school from quarantine.
- **MANDATORY** quarantines for **ALL** siblings/household members of students sent home from school with COVID-19 symptoms.
- Additional close contact quarantines as a result of "close contact" being **REDEFINED** to include anyone within 6 feet of a confirmed case of COVID-19 for at least 15 minutes 2 calendar days before the onset of symptoms or 2 calendar days before the positive sample was obtained.

Mandatory quarantines last up to 14 days. The school district will be unable to support elementary students quarantined unless an entire class and their teacher is quarantined at the same time. Supporting middle school students that have multiple teachers will not be possible. The unpredictability of quarantines will be extremely challenging for families, as students are sent home with little notice and forced to remain home for a period of days, if not weeks.

Additionally, IDPH released an entirely new definition of an “outbreak in a school” to include two confirmed cases of COVID-19 infections occurring within 14 calendar days of each other in the same classroom. Once an outbreak is identified, the school district is required to work with the Cook County Department of Public Health (CCDPH) to determine if an entire class is required to quarantine or if an entire school needs to be closed.

Changes in personal protective equipment (PPE) requirements are also problematic. The new guidance recommends school nurses utilize a fit-tested N95 respirator when performing clinical evaluation of a sick individual. Fit-tested N95 respirators are also recommended for personnel responsible for cleaning areas used by an individual known or suspected to have COVID-19. We are grateful for Palos Hospital for donating N95 respirators to the school district. Getting employees fit-tested is proving to be nearly impossible.

Since the updated IDPH guidance was issued last Wednesday, the administrative team has been meeting to see if and how we can implement it without widespread disruptions in our schools. I’ve asked our team to spend the next 48 hours continuing to analyze if we can do what so many school districts have already determined is impossible. As I’m sure many parents are aware, most area school districts have transitioned to remote learning since the new guidance was published. I feel we have an obligation to our community to exhaust all options prior to making that decision knowing the importance of in-person instruction.

IDPH Guidance to Local Health Departments

Just yesterday, IDPH issued “Interim School Guidance for Local Health Departments” to “support school officials in making decisions using current relevant information.” The timing of this guidance is extremely disconcerting considering schools are directed to consult and collaborate with local departments of public health, which apparently are only getting directives from IDPH as of this week on how to support their local school districts. Calls to the Cook County Department of Public Health regarding information on the new “Release from Isolation” letters referenced previously in this letter have gone unanswered.

Staffing Update

Filling current vacancies with qualified candidates prior to the start of in-person instruction is even more critical in light of the updated IDPH guidance. An anticipated increase in the number of required quarantines due to the new IDPH guidance will require additional substitute teachers of which we are already experiencing a shortage.

Remote Learning Plan

To say we will be extremely disappointed if we cannot begin the school year with in-person instruction is an understatement. However, we have a robust plan for remote learning that is fundamentally different than the eLearning students experienced last spring. The chart below outlines the major differences between the two. This year, remote learning will look very much like traditional school.

	E Learning Spring SY19-20	Remote Learning SY20-21
<i>Guaranteed 5 Clock Hours of Daily Instruction</i>	No	Yes
<i>Minimum 2.5 Hours of Daily Live Interaction with Teachers</i>	No	Yes
<i>District Owned Technology Devices for All</i>	No	Yes
<i>Consistent Daily Schedules that Mirror a School Day</i>	No	Yes
<i>Mandatory Daily Attendance</i>	No	Yes
<i>Letter Grades and Feedback</i>	No	Yes

A typical elementary school grades 1 through 5 schedule will have synchronous core academics in the morning with specials and auxiliary services in the afternoon. Each day will have a consistent set schedule for live interaction with teachers. Additional asynchronous activities will be assigned daily. These assignments can be completed in the afternoon after synchronous activities conclude. Below is an example of an elementary synchronous class schedule. Afternoon times are subject to change based on specials schedules and individual student services.

	M	T	W	Th	F
<i>SEL Morning Meeting</i>	9:00 a.m.- 9:20 a.m.	9:00 a.m.- 9:20 a.m.	9:00 a.m.- 9:20 a.m.	9:00 a.m.- 9:20 a.m.	9:00 a.m.- 9:20 a.m.
<i>ELA</i>	9:25 a.m. – 10:05 a.m.	9:25 a.m. – 10:05 a.m.	9:25 a.m. – 10:05 a.m.	9:25 a.m. – 10:05 a.m.	9:25 a.m. – 10:05 a.m.
<i>Math</i>	10:10 a.m. – 10:50 a.m.	10:10 a.m. – 10:50 a.m.	10:10 a.m. – 10:50 a.m.	10:10 a.m. – 10:50 a.m.	10:10 a.m. – 10:50 a.m.
<i>Social Studies</i>	10:55 a.m. – 11:15 a.m.	10:55 a.m. – 11:15 a.m.	10:55 a.m. – 11:15 a.m.	10:55 a.m. – 11:15 a.m.	10:55 a.m. – 11:15 a.m.
<i>Science</i>	11:20 a.m. – 11:40 a.m.	11:20 a.m. – 11:40 a.m.	11:20 a.m. – 11:40 a.m.	11:20 a.m. – 11:40 a.m.	11:20 a.m. – 11:40 a.m.
<i>Lunch/Break</i>	Break	Break	Break	Break	Break
<i>Special (Art, P.E., Music)</i>	1:10 p.m. – 1:30 p.m.	12:20 p.m. – 12:40 p.m.	1:10 p.m. – 1:30 p.m.	12:20 p.m. – 12:40 p.m.	1:10 p.m. – 1:30 p.m.

<i>Additional Services (EL, ALPs, etc.)</i>	1:35 p.m. – 1:55 p.m.	1:35 p.m. – 1:55 p.m.	1:35 p.m. – 1:55 p.m.	1:35 p.m. – 1:55 p.m.

A typical middle school schedule will look similar to a regular bell schedule with shortened periods and the addition of office hours. Each day will have a consistent set schedule for live interaction with teachers. Additional asynchronous activities will be assigned daily. These assignments can be completed in the afternoon after synchronous activities conclude. Below is the middle school synchronous schedule.

	M	T	W	Th	F
<i>Period 1</i>	8:15 a.m. – 8:35 a.m.	8:15 a.m. – 8:35 a.m.	8:15 a.m. – 8:35 a.m.	8:15 a.m. – 8:35 a.m.	8:15 a.m. – 8:35 a.m.
<i>Period 2</i>	8:40 a.m. – 9:00 a.m.	8:40 a.m. – 9:00 a.m.	8:40 a.m. – 9:00 a.m.	8:40 a.m. – 9:00 a.m.	8:40 a.m. – 9:00 a.m.
<i>Period 3</i>	9:05 a.m. – 9:25 a.m.	9:05 a.m. – 9:25 a.m.	9:05 a.m. – 9:25 a.m.	9:05 a.m. – 9:25 a.m.	9:05 a.m. – 9:25 a.m.
<i>Period 4</i>	9:30 a.m. – 9:50 a.m.	9:30 a.m. – 9:50 a.m.	9:30 a.m. – 9:50 a.m.	9:30 a.m. – 9:50 a.m.	9:30 a.m. – 9:50 a.m.
<i>Period 5</i>	9:55 a.m. – 10:15 a.m.	9:55 a.m. – 10:15 a.m.	9:55 a.m. – 10:15 a.m.	9:55 a.m. – 10:15 a.m.	9:55 a.m. – 10:15 a.m.
<i>Period 6</i>	10:20 a.m. – 10:40 a.m.	10:20 a.m. – 10:40 a.m.	10:20 a.m. – 10:40 a.m.	10:20 a.m. – 10:40 a.m.	10:20 a.m. – 10:40 a.m.
<i>Period 7</i>	10:45 a.m. – 11:05 a.m.	10:45 a.m. – 11:05 a.m.	10:45 a.m. – 11:05 a.m.	10:45 a.m. – 11:05 a.m.	10:45 a.m. – 11:05 a.m.
<i>Period 8</i>	11:10 a.m. – 11:30 a.m.	11:10 a.m. – 11:30 a.m.	11:10 a.m. – 11:30 a.m.	11:10 a.m. – 11:30 a.m.	11:10 a.m. – 11:30 a.m.
<i>Office Hours</i>	1:00 p.m. – 1:40 p.m.	1:00 p.m. – 1:40 p.m.	1:00 p.m. – 1:40 p.m.	1:00 p.m. – 1:40 p.m.	1:00 p.m. – 1:40 p.m.

Teacher Professional Development

This summer, our teachers have engaged in professional development opportunities in preparation for the possibility of remote learning this fall. These opportunities focused on creating effective remote lessons and deploying technology tools to facilitate effective remote learning. The school district will continue to offer professional development opportunities for teachers throughout the school year, regardless of our model of instruction.

Elementary Device Pickup Reminder

As a reminder to our Palos East and Palos West families, if you have not had a chance to pick up your child’s device we are available Thursday (8/20). Families with last names beginning with L-Z can pick up devices at Palos West from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Families with last names beginning with A-K can pick up devices from 2 p.m. to 6 p.m. All families (remote only and hybrid) must pick up their student devices.

Daycare Options

We understand that remote learning will place a significant childcare burden on many working families. The school district has worked the past two months to identify additional childcare options for district families. Ivy League has agreed to open up a new option for childcare at Palos Park Recreation and another location in Lemont. [Please see the attached flyer](#). We continue to explore additional childcare options for families.

Our school community's response to changing circumstances during these challenging times has been nothing short of amazing. Conversations around opening our schools have been thoughtful and respectful, which has not been the case in many places. I know a shift to remote only instruction to start the year will be an extreme disappointment for many of our families. It will also be a disappointment to our Board, administrative team, teachers and support staff that have remained committed to our reopening plan prior to the new guidance. **A final decision regarding the beginning of the school year will be made this Friday, August 21, to provide families time to adjust if needed.**

I'm grateful to partner with all of you as we continue to educate our students under the most difficult of circumstances. We are doing everything we can to return students and staff safely to the classroom.

Sincerely,

Dr. Anthony M. Scarsella
Superintendent of Schools