



Palos School District 118

8800 W. 119th St. | Palos Park, IL 60464 | 708-448-4800 | www.palos118.org

Dear Palos 118 Families,

Thank you for partnering with us to have a successful return to in-person instruction this week. As you can see from our [COVID-19 Dashboard](#), we performed very well operationally and thus far avoided a spike in positive COVID-19 cases after the Thanksgiving. Our one-week adaptive pause appears to have accomplished its goal of minimizing the potential for asymptomatic individuals entering schools after the holiday. As of this morning, we have 0 confirmed positive students that attended school this week. Only 30 students are currently in quarantine, of which only 8 were close contacts in school. We have seven more in-person school days remaining and need your continued vigilance to assist us in keeping schools open until winter recess begins on Wednesday, December 23. Let's work together to have a successful (and probably not sad) end to 2020.

In order to keep schools open, we are reminding parents to:

- Follow all of the existing safety procedures, including completing symptom self-certification forms daily;
- Keep symptomatic students home;
- Keep siblings of symptomatic students home;
- Keep students home if they are awaiting a test result or if a household member is awaiting a test result;
- Keep students home if you believe they have come into close contact with a probable or confirmed positive individual and; Follow the recommendation regarding travel from the Cook County Department of Public Health available here: <https://cookcountypublichealth.org/communicable-diseases/covid-19/covid-19-travel-guidance/>

Interruption of School Operations

Technology Outage

I want to take a moment to update parents on the interruption of school operations on Thursday, December 3, and Thursday, December 10. On December 3, the school district was the victim of a cyber-attack, the second such attack this year. As with the previous attack, with the help of our cyber-insurance team, we immediately reached out to and engaged professionals with significant experience in responding to cyber-attacks for assistance in containing, remediating, and investigating the incident. We focused, first and foremost, on containing the incident and attempting to make sure our systems were no longer at risk from this attacker. Based on our experts' information, we believe the incident is now contained, and our systems are not at further risk of compromise related to this attack.

Based on our investigation, we have no reason to believe that our student database or financial software system was breached or otherwise compromised. Likewise, based on our investigation, we have no reason to believe that personally identifiable student or staff information was breached or otherwise compromised.

Fortunately, our Technology Department put in additional security measures after the first attack that has allowed them to restore systems quickly in response to this incident, so we expect any adverse impact on our operations to be minimal. Palos 118 is not alone in the fight against cyberattacks. School districts are increasingly targets of cyberattacks as technology has become more essential to operating schools amid the ongoing pandemic. We continue to work with our outside experts in an effort to harden our information security and reduce the threat against these types of attacks in the future.

The cyber-attack on December 3 happened just before the start of school and hampered our ability to provide remote services and in-person instruction.

Water Main Break

On December 10, a water main break occurred in the vicinity of Palos South Middle School. When the break was repaired and water service restored, a pump in the lower level of the school failed, resulting in water backing up into the school's lower level. The water service to the school had to be shut off in order to repair the failed pump making our restrooms inoperable. We cannot operate the school without running water and operable restrooms.

The failure of the pump was detected just prior to the start of school, requiring a quick decision to close Palos South. Asynchronous activities with office hours were delivered in lieu of full remote learning because teachers were unable to access their classrooms to utilize technology tools that have become an integral part of teaching remotely. I share your stress and frustration regarding these interruptions to instruction. As a school district, we do plan for the unexpected, which is why we were able to resume operations within a day of these two incidents occurring.

This week's metrics:

- **A return to Phase 3 of the Governor's Restore Illinois Plan**
Suburban Cook County remains in Phase 4, which allows schools to conduct in-person instruction. Governor Pritzker's Tier 3 mitigation measures for our region remain in place. Source: Governor's Office
- **Outbreaks of confirmed COVID-19 cases in schools**
We are unaware of any reported outbreaks in area schools. Staffing shortages have impacted some south suburban school districts requiring them to remain in adaptive pause. Source: ISC-4 and media reports.
- **Confirmed Community Spread**
The transmission of COVID-19 is widespread throughout suburban Cook County. Test Positivity is "substantial." New Cases per 100,000 is "substantial." New Cases are "minimal." Youth Case Increase is "minimal." The 7-day and 14-day rolling positivity rates are both $\geq 8\%$. Source: IDPH and Northwestern University
- **Directive from IDPH, CCDPH, ISBE, or the Governor's Office**
There have been no new directives. The CDC has issued updated guidance on quarantines, which the school district will implement if approved by IDPH.
- **District 118 Staffing**
The school district will monitor staffing closely until winter break. If you are interested in becoming a substitute teacher, visit the [employment page](#) of our website to see if you qualify and to fill out an online application.
- **COVID Dashboard Statistics**
The Dashboard has been updated and can be found by visiting our website. Source: www.palos118.org

Sincerely,

Dr. Anthony M. Scarsella
Superintendent of Schools