



Palos School District 118

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Dear Palos 118 Families,

The end of the first quarter is rapidly approaching as we conclude our fifth week of in-person learning. I have no doubt that our students continue to progress academically and social emotionally regardless of the model of instruction they are receiving. Compared to other school districts, I firmly believe our students are receiving the very best instruction during this pandemic due in large part to our ability to structure staffing in a manner that allows in-person teachers to focus on in-person students and remote learning teachers to focus on remote learning students. At the same time, our schools have worked hard to ensure that all students remain connected to the school district. Even during this challenging time, we remain one Palos 118.

A critical component of our safety plan is contact tracing. To date, our contact tracing of positive students and staff clearly demonstrates that transmission of the virus is occurring outside of school. A majority of positive cases have been traced back to a positive family member or friend. In order to keep our schools open, we need parents to continue to feel completely comfortable with sharing information with us when we conduct our contact tracing. We must have reliable information to determine whether or not transmission occurred in school. I want to thank our parents for their continued partnership as we work together to keep our students and staff safe.

As outlined below, positivity rates and new cases continue to rise throughout our school community. What is happening in our community is impacting what is happening in our schools. Student positivity rates are increasing as overall community rates increase. This trend has resulted in the need to quarantine a significant number of students and staff. Rising rates and quarantines are most pronounced at Palos South, mirroring what is happening at the national level. Across the country, statistics demonstrate middle and high school students are much more likely to contract the virus compared to elementary students. Currently, we have four positive elementary students and 12 middle school students. A total of 96 elementary school students quarantined, and 180 middle school students quarantined. Due to privacy laws, we cannot disaggregate this data further for families.

This week's discouraging COVID-19 statistics prompted the school district to consult with our public health officials regarding the continuation of in-person instruction. The Cook County Department of Public Health has advised the school district to be "ready to adaptively pause and transition to remote learning" if trends continue. An "adaptive pause" means one or more schools transitioning to remote learning for a period of no less than 14 calendar days. If current trends continue, families need to be ready for the probability of an adaptive pause. In the event a school must close, the following steps will be taken:

- Families that are affected by an adaptive pause will be given as much notice as possible.
- For students that are currently remote only, there will be no change. Remote only students will continue to follow their regular schedules without disruption.
- For in-person students, the first day of remote learning will be asynchronous only to allow teachers and staff time to transition from in-person to remote instruction. Assignments will be posted on Schoology and Seesaw.
- Beginning the second day, in-person students will follow their current in-person schedules at home remotely with minor modifications. Parents should check their child's Schoology and/or Seesaw account for Zoom links and additional details.

It is our primary goal to have as little disruption as possible to school schedules and learning routines if we have to temporarily transition from in-person to remote learning.

As the Thanksgiving holiday approaches, I'm extremely concerned about an even greater spike in new cases and positivity rates as older siblings return from college and families make individual decisions about holiday gatherings and travel. A flurry of new positive cases may very well overwhelm our ability to effectively staff our schools and/or severely hamper our ability to effectively respond to positive cases. It is not inevitable that a school or multiple schools will need to close; however, I am urging everyone to be prepared for that possibility.

Travel Quarantines

As families make personal decisions regarding travel during the holidays, I want to outline the school district's expectations for travel quarantines. Families traveling to states and regions with a high incidence of COVID-19 infections must adhere to the Cook County Department of Public Health's quarantine recommendations upon return. For more on CCDPH's travel guidance, please click on the following link <https://cookcountypublichealth.org/communicable-diseases/covid-19/covid-19-travel-guidance/>. Please note quarantines are only recommended for individuals visiting high-incidence states for more than 24 hours. If you are planning on traveling for the holidays and will be visiting a high-incidence state, please inform your child's school as soon as possible. Support will be provided to students during a travel quarantine in the same manner as currently provided for students requiring quarantine. Please contact your child's school for more information on quarantine support.

1. 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. In his daily COVID briefing, Governor Pritzker warned that Illinois might have to return to Phase 2 in response to current trends statewide. Source: Governor's Office and IDPH**

2. Outbreaks of confirmed COVID-19 cases in schools

We are unaware of any reported outbreaks in area schools. Palos Heights 128 recently implemented an adaptive pause due to "the accelerated pace at which we [D128] are experiencing [positive] cases." Please note that D128's decision to implement an adaptive pause was NOT due to an outbreak in any of their schools. Source: ISC-4, Dr. Merryll Brownlow, D128 Superintendent.

3. Confirmed Community Spread

Transmission of COVID-19 is spreading throughout school community. As of 11/05/20, Test Positivity is "moderate." New Cases per 100,000 is "substantial." New Cases are "substantial." Youth Case Increase is "substantial." The 7-day and 14-day rolling positivity rates are both $\geq 8\%$. Source: IDPH and Northwestern University

4. Directive from IDPH, CCDPH, ISBE, or the Governor's Office

CCDPH has advised Palos 118 to be "ready to adaptively pause and transition to remote learning."

5. District 118 Staffing

As the number of staff quarantines rise, the school district will have greater difficulty filling positions with our limited substitute pool.

6. COVID Dashboard Statistics

The number of confirmed positive students has tripled since last week. Staff cases declined. Precautionary student quarantines are up with 17.5% of all students in quarantine. The majority of quarantined students are at Palos South. Staff quarantines are also up. Currently, 8% of staff are quarantined. Source: District 118 www.palos118.org

The school district cannot control the trajectory of this pandemic or what occurs outside of school. We remain committed to providing both in-person and remote learning for our Palos 118 students as long as it is safe. We will continue to consult with CCDPH and rely on the advice of our public health professionals. Please remember to wear

a mask, wash your hands, keep your distance, and avoid touching your face. Together, we can turn the tide on these negative trends and keep our schools open.

Stay well.

Sincerely,

Dr. Anthony M. Scarsella
Superintendent of Schools