

## August 14

District 200 School Community,

Our Board of Education remains committed and has prioritized the development of a Reopening Plan that provides a way to bring students in for in-person learning. I write to you today to provide an update on our Reopening Plans based on some new guidance we received shortly before our last Board Meeting on August 12 from the [Illinois Department of Public Health](#) (IDPH). I apologize for the length of this communication, but there are a lot of details I need to share with you to help the community understand why we will need to change our Reopening Plans.

As has been the trend from our State and local authorities, school districts are receiving new guidance at the same time as the public. While joint guidance from the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) and the Illinois Department of Public Health released on June 23 created a path and encouraged school districts to bring students back for in-person instruction, new guidelines released late on August 12 have led us to make the difficult decision to change our plans. While the updated guidance document covered a number of different areas that will impact school operations, we have highlighted specific areas below that are problematic for our middle and high schools and a few aspects of our elementary plan.

When our Core Reopening Team began planning for the 20-21 school year, we said from the onset that if there was a path that allowed for students to return to school, we would do everything we could to bring them back while also offering families a virtual option. We also have shared that we will follow all guidance from our health experts and adjust plans if needed based on fluid guidance.

At this time, based on the new guidance, we are still working through a number of changes that need to be made to our Reopening Plans. However, here are a few changes we do know:

- Students in grades 6-12 will start the school year with remote learning. E-Learning plans this fall will look very different than in the spring and will be more structured, rigorous and synchronous (live with a teacher).
- Students in elementary schools and at Jefferson will have the opportunity to start the year with in-person instruction, but we will need to modify schedules to follow new guidelines. At the elementary schools and Jefferson, we have the opportunity to manage cohorts of students much better than at the middle and high schools with no movement during the day.
- Students in specific, specialized programs will have the opportunity to return for in-person instruction, but we will need to modify schedules to follow new guidelines.
- Virtual Academy students at the elementary and middle schools will continue as planned receiving their instruction from District 200 teachers.

- Virtual Academy students at the high schools will now receive their instruction from District 200 teachers through our classes. There will no longer be two separate tracks at the high school level.
- Based on our need to adjust plans, we will need to push back the start of school. At this time, the Reopening Team will recommend an August 26 start date for staff and a September 1 start date for students for Board of Education approval.

Below, I have outlined some specific new guidelines that have made our current plans impossible to implement. The main areas of concern include: adjusted close contact definitions for contact tracing, student and staff school exclusion for COVID-like symptoms and cleaning protocols that will require school closure to carry out in the event of a confirmed case.

**Close contact has been redefined and presents contact tracing challenges.**

Close contact is now defined as anyone (with or without a face covering) who was within 6 feet of a confirmed case of COVID-19 (with or without a face covering), for at least 15 minutes throughout the course of a day. The period of close contact begins 2 calendar days before the onset of symptoms. *Prior to yesterday*, the 15 minutes was any one instance on any one single day. This running 24-hour clock for any two days is an extremely difficult accumulation of time to account for and to contact trace in - especially when passing periods and lunch are taken into account. Figuring out how to account for this new running clock for anyone who a student or staff member may have come into close contact with will be very difficult and will likely lead to more students and staff needing to quarantine.

**New expectations for COVID-like symptoms present challenges to staff our buildings.**

- Adjusted guidance now states that all students and staff sent home or remaining home with COVID-like symptoms should be diagnostically tested. Students and staff should remain home from school until they receive their test results.
  - This new requirement would require anyone that displayed one COVID-like symptom (fever or chills, cough, shortness of breath or difficulty breathing, fatigue, muscle or body aches, headache, new loss of taste or smell, sore throat, congestion or runny nose, nausea or vomiting, or diarrhea) while at school to get tested for COVID. Many of these are very common ailments that we see in the nurse's office every day at school.
  - We have not had a conversation with the DuPage County Health Department about testing at this level and do not have resources prepared to offer our students or staff to get tested at this frequency. It is unlikely we would be able to staff a large secondary building while many staff could be out several days while waiting to receive test results for symptoms that seem ordinary, but present as COVID-like symptoms.
- Students and staff with COVID-like symptoms who do not get tested for COVID-19, and who do not provide a doctor's note documenting an alternative diagnosis, must complete 10 calendar days of isolation from the date of first symptom onset and be fever-free for

24 hours without use of fever-reducing medications and other symptoms have improved before returning to school.

- This would require everyone with COVID-like symptoms that does not have COVID to get a doctor's note saying they do not have COVID and have a negative test result. Additional guidance we have received indicates if someone has regular ongoing COVID-like symptoms (due to something like allergies) the student or staff member **would need a doctor's note and a weekly negative COVID test to continue attending school**. The student attendance and staffing implications to this change are tremendous.
- If a student is sent home sick with suspected COVID symptoms (e.g., runny nose, fever, diarrhea, etc.), all their siblings/household members must be sent home as well and quarantined for 14 calendar days. If one of the household members is being evaluated for COVID, the rest of the household must be quarantined until an alternative diagnosis is made or a negative result is received.
  - This is a new expectation that has not been communicated to our families or our staff. This will be particularly difficult for staffing a school, as a teacher whose child or household member is sent home sick from school would result in the staff member being out of work for 14 days. Providing substitute coverage for this would be extremely difficult as this new requirement would likely cause many staff members to need to stay home regularly. We would also expect to have a larger amount of the students out as a result of this change as well

### **New cleaning guidance presents challenges to keep schools open.**

It is recommended that all areas used by an individual with COVID-like symptoms should be vacated and cleaned, **but not until 24 hours have passed since** that individual was in the specific area. In middle and high schools, a single student could have been in at least 8-10 areas at minimum throughout the course of a day. That would mean schools would likely need to close multiple classrooms and common areas, and even an entire school, in the event of an ill individual, for 24-48 hours. This certainly would not allow for good continuity of a learning experience.

As I shared last Friday, the last few months have been incredibly trying on everyone. The circumstances we find ourselves in are fraught with unpredictability and it is challenging for us all to operate under such conditions. I am fully confident that the Board of Education, Administration and Reopening Team have done everything we could to build a path to bringing all students back for in-person instruction, but we also stated that a guiding belief was that we need to be able to keep students in school. I am greatly saddened and frustrated that we must change our current plans. However, if these changes are measures that will keep our students, staff and community healthier and able to access education, we will adhere to these changes and move forward.

We know that these updates will bring about many questions about how the school year will start and how students who will be learning remotely will receive the supplies and materials they

will need to begin the school year. We are quickly working to detail that information and will communicate it to our families starting next week.

We will keep the community informed as we work through this new guidance to determine if, how, and when we can still offer in-person learning. Please expect to hear from me again early next week with updated Reopening Plan information and details. We are committed to doing everything possible, within the guidelines, to create a path back toward in-person learning for all.

Sincerely,

Jeff Schuler