

COVID-19 Report and Discussion

COVID Numbers Continue to Climb

The morning after our last board meeting, July 17, 2020, the number of positive cases of COVID-19 in Wright County had climbed to 414 and ranked our county fifth in the State of Iowa in cases per capita.

By Monday, August 10, the number of positive cases of COVID-19 in Wright County had climbed to 472 which moved our county up to the third most cases per capita in the State of Iowa.

Spiking the most severely right now in Wright County is the city of Belmond. A state testing strike force is in town working with our hospital and medical professionals.

The new *TestIowa* site opened on Monday, August 10 at the Iowa Specialty Hospital located at 403 1st Street Southwest. The site will be open Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 12 p.m. Anyone can schedule an appointment for a test, after completing an online assessment, through testiowa.com.

Considering Options for School's Start

Although we have been committed to starting school on-time with all students every day, recent circumstances are causing us to reconsider our plan.

On Monday, August 10, our three schools were informed by the doctors and pediatricians of Iowa Specialty Hospitals and Clinics that, "it looks like it is going to be appropriate to consider starting school in a different way than in-person."

On that Monday, Wright County was over the Governor's 15% positive threshold at 16%. However, the Governor also requires a 10% absence rate.

We continue to work closely with Clarion and Eagle Grove schools. On Monday, August 10, I contacted the Iowa Department of Education on behalf of all three Wright County schools just to inquire about the possibility of applying for online instruction, rather than opening to in-person classes.

If a Student in Class is Infected

On Thursday, July 9, the medical leaders of Wright County met with school superintendents for a summit on the reopening of school. On that date, using the best information we had at that time, we decided that if a student in a classroom was identified as infected with COVID-19 that the other students were not considered exposed if their faces were properly covered with masks and/or shields. Therefore, only the infected student and any other students not properly masked would need to quarantine for 14 days. The rest of the class—properly masked—would not

quarantine and would continue to come to school daily. This rule was a principle in our Return-to-learn Reopening Plan.

However, the Iowa Department of Public Health took a new position last week. If a student is identified as positive for the virus, any students within six feet for more than 15 consecutive minutes will be considered exposed, regardless if they were masked or not. Because of this new rule, permanent seating charts will be even more essential, and we will have to work harder at maintaining small, cohort groups of students.

During a press conference yesterday (August 6), Governor Reynolds clarified the rule above does not apply to teachers.

Parent Survey Shows Support for Our Plan

Last week and this week, we have been surveying our parents to get their opinions and recommendations for the opening of school on August 24. Here is what we are gathering:

- Sixty percent of parents indicate they will send their children back to school full time. Only ten percent plan to keep their kiddoes at home. Thirty percent remain undecided.
- If there is a larger outbreak later, 40% of parents plan to keep their kids at home rather than have them attend school even on a partial basis.
- Two-thirds of our bus parents plan to transport their children to ease the crowding on our buses.
- A third of parents say that face masks and shields are key to reopening.
- Only a very small minority of parents expressed in the comment section that they were unhappy with the school requiring all students to wear face masks.

The survey will close at the end of the day tomorrow (July 31). Registration opens August 1.

Reopening Plan Included

Presented tonight is our Return-to-learn Reopening Plan. Although it will be revised continually as new information and scientific research emerges, this is our final plan. It is intended to be a very pragmatic document of procedures, processes, and rules for how we will do our best to keep students and staff safe this year. It is essentially the same plan being used by Clarion (CGD) and Eagle Grove schools.

Our Reopening Plan has no political ideology or agenda. It is based upon the best and most recent scientific research and guidance of the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and the American Academy of Pediatrics. It was assembled under the direction of the physicians and pediatricians of Iowa Specialty Hospitals and Clinics and the personnel at Wright County Public Health. Our plan has the full support and endorsement of those entities.

School Opening Preparations

We are getting ready for school to open with all students in all of our classrooms in a little over three weeks, on Monday, August 24. The TLC Teacher Leaders are collaborating with the administration on our reopening action plan. Here are some of the preparations we are making for the opening:

1. All students, faculty, staff, and visitors are required to wear face coverings anywhere inside our buildings, including classrooms and offices, and anywhere physical distancing is not possible.
2. Five re-usable masks are currently ordered for every student. We intend that students will wear a fresh mask each day, and once a week the masks will be washed at home. If we have homes where washing will be a problem, we may consider washing some masks at school. To encourage mask wearing, we will have five different colors for each of five different days:
 - Monday – Navy Blue
 - Tuesday – Kelly Green
 - Wednesday – Neon Orange (to stress safety)
 - Thursday – Purple (to honor our Belmond alumni)
 - Friday – Red (to honor our military service members)
3. Face shields have been ordered for all students, PK-12. We anticipate shields will be most appropriate for preschool through grade 3. The school will provide face masks for all classes grades four through six. Face shields are available for any teacher who decides face shields are a better option for his or her students. The school will provide face masks for all students in grades seven through twelve. A face shield is available for any student upon request.
4. Top quality face shields have been ordered for every staff member. The shield is not required but will be an option. Staff have the option to choose to wear either a mask or a face shield or both. Face shields will be very important to our young students, our special education students, and our English language learners.

NOTE: Evidence suggests the shields are not as good as masks in protecting against the virus. Dr. Fauci recommends both masks and face shields, as does Wright County Public Health.
5. We have temperature screening devices mounted in the entry areas of the school buildings. Both students and staff will have temperature checks and will be screened for symptoms upon entering the buildings. Any student or staff member with a fever of 100.4 degrees or greater or symptoms of possible COVID-19 virus infection will not be present in school.
6. Plexiglass is installed in reception areas above the reception desk in all three offices.
7. We have pump bottles of alcohol-based hand sanitizer in every classroom, and we have an ample stockpile of gallon bottles of the sanitizer.
8. We have developed rules for our classrooms:
 - Students will be seated at least three-feet apart.

- Students and student desks will all be facing the same direction.
 - Physical education classes and music classes will be convened outside whenever possible.
 - Classroom doors will be left open rather than having students frequently touch the door handles.
9. The school will self-contain classes to minimize crossover among children and adults within the school. Teachers are encouraged to utilize outdoor spaces when possible.
 10. Adults and adult staff within schools will attempt to maintain a distance of six feet from other adult staff. Meetings and curriculum planning will take place virtually when possible. Faculty and staff are discouraged from congregating in lounge areas and the staff lunch room.
 11. Teachers shall teach and reinforce washing hands following CDC guidance.
 12. Students will not use their lockers except for storing their coats. Instead, students are asked to bring all their books and supplies in their bookbags and carry their bags throughout the school day.
 13. We will stagger passing time and dismissal time to avoid crowding in our hallways.
 14. Students will take their recess breaks in cohort groups of limited size. Recess times will be adjusted to create cohort groups with limited size.
 15. Our tentative plan for lunch is to serve students individually plated meals or in boxed lunches in their classrooms instead of in a communal cafeteria.
 16. Parents will be discouraged from entering the school. Visitors will be allowed on a limited-basis only. Visitors must comply with the district's requirement of face masks in order to enter any school facility.

Outside Groups Restricted

The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) advises, "Limit any nonessential visitors, volunteers, and activities involving external groups or organizations as possible."

With the reopening of school approaching, we are getting requests to use our gymnasium and other facilities. Due to the heightened danger of adult-to-adult transmission of the COVID-19 virus, we are not allowing outside groups into our buildings. The safety of our own students and staff must take precedence during this time of pandemic.

No Plans for Fall Sports

The boys' athletic association and the girls' athletic union have been imploring the Iowa Department of Education and the Iowa Department of Public Health for guidance on fall sports. So far both have refused. From the perspective of the state, Iowa was the only state to hold summer sports, and 96% of baseball and 97% of softball athletes successfully completed their seasons.

From the perspectives of the association and union, their job is to schedule contests, not cancel them. Lacking any guidance otherwise, it is the intent of the two athletic organizations to facilitate the fall sports seasons of football, volleyball, and cross country in their entirety.

On a side note, last week the Indiana high school athletic association stated that at that late date, they had no option but to proceed with the fall seasons. So, Indiana is doing something merely because no one is willing to make a decision to do so or not.

Changes to the Football Season

The athletic association shortened the regular football season from nine games to seven. Dropped from our schedule will be the games planned for weeks three and four.

Anticipating some high school teams will have their seasons interrupted for the virus, all high schools will make the playoffs this year. Game eight will be a playoff game, and all teams will participate.

Football Cheerleading

Football cheerleading tryouts are always held in the spring and can be quite competitive (and even a bit emotional). Last spring, we could not hold tryouts due to the pandemic. Sometimes the team chosen in the spring attends cheer camps over the summer. This did not happen this year.

Now with football season rapidly gaining on us, there will be girls who want to be on the cheer squad. We plan to have no try-outs. Anyone who wants to be a cheerleader may do so. It could be a very bid squad this year. Egalitarian.

District Office Open

When the White House last spring advised that all employees who could work from home should do so, the three employees in our central office downtown began working from home. This has worked out very well for the last several months. However, with school reopening in two weeks, I have asked our central office personnel to resume their in-office work beginning Monday, August 10.

Our rules for face coverings at the district office will be the same as everywhere else in the district. Each of us in the district offices has an individual office space. Masks wearing will not be required when someone is alone in her workspace, just as teachers will not have to wear masks when alone in their classrooms. But if anyone else enters an office, or if someone has to leave her office to refill a coffee mug, the employee must be masked.