

School District 12 Update

February 10, 2022

*From the Desk of
Dr. Mary Henderson*



[2021-22 School Year Calendar](#)

[2022-23 School Year Calendar](#)

Board of Education Meet and Greet: Tuesday, February 22, 2022 at 6:15 p.m. (Village Hall)

Regular monthly Board of Education Meeting: Tuesday, February 22, 2022 at 7:00 p.m.

Next SMART Day: Wednesday, February 16, 2022

8th grade graduation: Tuesday, May 24

Illinois Department of Public Health [Trend Data](#)

DuPage County Health Department [Data Dashboard](#)

Dear D12 Families,

As I shared on Sunday, we anticipated that this week would bring activity around COVID-19 mitigation efforts. You may be aware that yesterday Governor Pritzker announced that the indoor mask mandate would be lifted on February 28 as long as metrics continue to improve. He also announced that this does *not* apply to schools. No matter your thoughts on whether or not mitigation efforts should continue, I imagine that the lack of a plan for schools was as frustrating to you as it was to those of us working in schools. A continued lack of clarity and path forward from the state level is difficult for all of us; therefore we are moving forward in a manner that is consistent with our approach throughout the pandemic: Data, review of guidance, and a priority on safely providing in person learning for all.

Our Return to Learn team met on Wednesday to review a variety of metrics, look at feedback from parents and staff, and review a draft of a plan that uses data to provide an off ramp to layers of mitigation. When I refer to “a variety of metrics,” the following were reviewed and considered:

- **Pediatric case counts for 5-14 year olds in DuPage County:** We are seeing a continued steady decline.
- **Positivity rate for the 60172 zip code:** currently at 5.66%.
- **Case counts in D12 from the week of January 10 to current:** Counts range from 2-6 cases per school per week
- **Results from our COVID-19 testing:** Zero positive cases with 452 tests

These data points show a much improved picture in our D12 community and have informed our planning.

We have been advised by our legal counsel that a substantive ruling on the temporary restraining order (TRO) will come by the end of next week. While we have developed a plan for moving to a mask recommended school environment based on our local data and will be implementing the *preparation* phase for this immediately, we will not implement the full plan until after we review and navigate the impact of any ruling on the TRO. Therefore, we anticipate fully implementing our mask recommended plan on February 28.

Why are we including a preparation phase for a mask recommended environment and not making the switch now?

1. The feedback from many parents and staff reflect a strong belief that masks are effective and should be continued for now. As we shift to an environment where masks are recommended, we will secure N95 masks for our staff and families that choose them for their child(ren).
2. We also have feedback from many parents that reflect a strong desire to have a mask optional environment. This strong difference in beliefs is one that we must be able to reconcile in order to keep our schools a safe environment for each of our students. During the 2020-21 school year, families were able to choose a learning model that accommodated their feelings, beliefs and needs surrounding the pandemic. With that option removed this year, as a district we are tasked with finding ways to support the feelings, beliefs, and needs of all families and all staff members in one learning model. **One promise I can make you is that we will not be segregating or separating students by mask use, vaccination status, or any other status that would cause division.** We are committed to finding ways to thread this very narrow needle that are supportive of all.
3. There are questions surrounding quarantine requirements in a mask recommended environment that will take a bit of time to sort out.
4. I know that all families believe it's important that each student and staff member's choice for mask wearing is accepted and respected as we make this shift. Helping our students understand this and preparing them for a classroom environment with both options in place will set us up for success.
5. We look to see continued improvement in our positivity rate with a goal of 5% or less.
6. We need to determine what the expectations are for sports and extracurricular activities.

This week has been chaotic and traumatic in many school communities that shifted their practices overnight, and that chaos has spilled into schools. Reports of students having masks ripped off of their faces by peers, students threatened by peers for not wearing a mask, and a whole range of concerning behaviors have taken place. **This is not what we want for our students or our staff.** Taking time to move into this next phase in a thoughtful and deliberate manner will allow us to meet kids where they are and support them appropriately as we move forward as well as preparing our staff to navigate this and keep our classrooms as safe and supportive learning environments.

What will remain the same when we move to a mask recommended phase?

1. Masks on bus: This is part of a federal transportation order and can't be lifted at this time.
2. Physical distancing: Our classrooms have been configured to maintain three feet of distancing while allowing for desks in groups.
3. Keeping students home when they exhibit signs of COVID-19 until a negative test result has been received or an alternate diagnosis provided.
4. Lunchroom: We are maintaining our current lunchroom arrangement and procedures. Once we see the impact of a mask recommended environment, we will revisit this.
5. COVID-19 testing: No change in our testing program. As we shift to a mask optional environment, parents may still sign their child up for screening.
6. Isolation procedures for positive cases

As shared above, there is clarification needed on quarantine protocols and that information will be shared as we are able to finalize this aspect of our plan.

While we believe that the metrics support this move, we also have to leave flexibility in any plan for changing conditions. Outbreaks may occur within a classroom or school, and we will have to respond with measures to contain them. Please do not interpret this to mean we will be in a continual "masks recommended today but mandatory tomorrow" type of cycle. **We do not expect that to be the case.** Additionally, we will also monitor our metrics to determine if and when other mitigation layers may be removed. Conversely, our plan will need to provide benchmarks that would require mitigation layers going back into place should conditions warrant. Specifics on metrics, measures and other aspects of our plan will be shared no later than the February 22 Board of Education meeting.

I believe in our community's ability to navigate this next phase with compassion and respect for all. I believe in our teachers' ability to maintain supportive classrooms. Most importantly, I believe in our kids' ability to accept and respect differences, particularly when they are given time to talk through their own feelings and learn from the adult models around them.

Thank you for your patience with this lengthy communication. One last note: Our feeder districts and Lake Park High School have worked hard throughout to be as consistent as possible. Each district has its unique needs, and each of us need to involve multiple groups in the development of plans and how we communicate and who we consult. Please respect that districts may have a different timeline based on their needs and may communicate that information differently or at a later time.

Sincerely,
Dr. Henderson

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