



Christian County Public Schools Statement on Kentucky Department of Public Health Guidance Related to COVID 19 Pandemic

Since September 8, Christian County Public Schools has been back in session for the first time since March 13, 2020. We have utilized the Healthy at School guidelines, adapted to the current pandemic requirements, collaborated with our local health department, and executed a successful re-entry plan. We have said since the beginning of this process that our efforts were to honor the parents of CCPS in providing them the choice for their child to either return to school for in-person instruction or utilize our district Virtual Learning Academy.

Earlier this week the Kentucky Department of Public Health (KDHP) along with the Governor's Office released new COVID-19 guidance. This guidance is a metric for monitoring local communities' COVID-19 incidence rates. The local health department and school district have been asked to implement this monitoring tool and follow the recommendation to close schools to in-person learning if the incident rate of the community rises above 25 cases per day (out of a scaled population of 100,000) over a 7-day rolling average. According to officials at the local health department, Christian County is projected to go into this category in the coming week.

Christian County Public Schools is committed to being transparent and honest with the number of COVID-19 cases within our school community. As of Friday, September 18, there are 26 (0.26% of our total population) confirmed cases in our school system, 23 (0.25%) students and 3 (0.08%) staff members. The CCPS Healthy at School Officers have conducted contact tracing of the 26 cases and have determined that no cases were contracted during in-person learning. The one identified spread was on an extracurricular team contracted outside of normal school hours, and was immediately shut down. The majority of our positive cases have come from either a close-contact where the student was already in quarantine, an outside of school activity, or an extracurricular event. Of the 23 student cases, 5 are enrolled in our Virtual Learning Academy (the 2nd highest positive case number of our 17 schools), 17 students are enrolled in our secondary schools, and we have associated only 6 positive cases with our elementary schools (3 of the 6 associated with one close contact household quarantine.) Because of our mitigation efforts, the quick response of our Healthy at School Officers, and our responsible and constant collaboration efforts with the local health department, we were able to stop any further spread in two of our schools earlier last week. We have conducted health and welfare checks with all of our students and staff and everyone is doing well and recovering with little or no symptoms. On Friday, September 18, we had zero new COVID-19 cases reported within the district.

As the Superintendent of Schools, my first responsibility is to advocate for the students in our community. By opening up schools and returning students to the classroom on September 8, we brought back hope to almost 70% of our district's families, parents, and students. We have taught our students how to operate within the new normal, properly sanitize their hands, wear a mask, social distance, and complete virtual learning if we are ever forced to transition back to NTI. Last week, many of our schools began grade-level instruction for the first time in almost 6 months. This coming

week, all of our schools are beginning the system of benchmark assessments to see what educational

gaps our students have as we begin the recovery process from loss of learning in the spring. Public schools continue to offer numerous, layered services to keep our kids safe, educated, and healthy. Now during the COVID-19 era, we are doing our part to ensure they are in school and participating in a controlled, accountable, and safe environment.

Our local and state leaders have the responsibility to present clear guidance, set direction, and the necessary guidelines for organizations to effectively operate during these unprecedented times. During an interview on Monday, September 14 on KET, the new Kentucky Commissioner of Education, Dr. Jason Glass was asked a question concerning the KDHP's new metric system and state incidence rate reporting process: "Those metrics are important. They're useful in those local decision-making processes but they have to be looked through from an informed group mentality. You have to look at the data not just as an automatic trigger: because this says something, we do x or we do y. It's really got to be based on what are the values of the community. What's the virus level? Are we prepared? Are we ready? And then make an informed decision." The next day on Tuesday, September 15, during a Superintendent's webcast, Dr. Glass responded to the KDHP color-coded metric and conversations surrounding using the chart to close schools. He clarified the KDHP recommendation for all Kentucky School Districts: "When it comes to the color-coded system that is presenting public health data around COVID-19 positive cases, that is a recommendation that you (Dr. Stack, KDHP Director) strongly urge local school boards to take into account as they make decisions and it's in the statute that the school board should be the one that determines if schools are open or closed using these different models."

As a district, we intend to follow the guidance of Commissioner Glass and consider the KDHP chart as a factor in our overall decision making process. Christian County Public Schools will monitor the COVID-19 pandemic daily. We assume the responsibility of mitigating the spread of the virus within our district using our re-entry plan, and we will continually work in a close partnership with our local health department to keep all of our students and staff safe. Our first priorities are the health, safety, welfare, and education of all our students. We cannot ensure these priorities are accomplished by closing our doors to in-person instruction, which would frankly be an easy way to opt out of the responsibilities of bringing students back in-person. We are not here to make the easiest decision but the best decision for our students. By offering parents and children a choice of in-school or virtual at-home learning, we are upholding our commitment to offer opportunities that best address a family's educational needs.

In conclusion, we are asking that our local government officials, community members, and the Christian County Health Department take into consideration the message and idea of partnership, alignment, and collaboration in fighting this COVID-19 pandemic together. With that, it is the intent of our school system to continue in-person classes for our students through fall break. We look forward to the coming days as we approach fall break and pray for all of our students and their families to stay safe and well so that we can continue to educate our students.

Chris Bentzel
Superintendent
Christian County Public Schools