

WORTH SCHOOL DISTRICT 127

DISTRICT OFFICE DR. ROSEMARY LUCAS ADMINISTRATIVE CENTER 11218 SOUTH RIDGELAND AVENUE, WORTH, IL 60482



Monday, August 17, 2020

Dear Worth 127 Parents and Guardians,

It is with an extremely burdened heart I write this letter. On Thursday, August 13, the Illinois Department of Health (IDPH) published updated guidance for opening schools that has brought me to the conclusion that in-person learning is not a safe option to start the 2020/2021 school year. There are several significant changes in the updated guidance that are new and could not be considered or accounted for by the COVID Advisory Committee during the past few months the group spent working on our Return-To-Learn plans. The first day of school will remain Wednesday, August 26, but there will no longer be A/B days for in-person learning for the parents that chose that option for their child. All students will now learn remotely for the time being. This decision will be revisited mid-September with the hope that in-person learning will be an option sooner rather than later. The time and energy spent on developing the Blended Learning Model with A/B days was time well spent by administrators and teachers when we can return to in-person learning.

Chromebook pick up for all students will be at Worthwoods Elementary School. Parents may drive-thru the Worthwoods parking lot to pick up Chromebooks on the following dates and times:

- Friday, August 21 9:00 am – 11:00 am
- Monday, August 24 10:00 am - 12:00 pm
- Tuesday, August 25 1:00 pm – 3:00 pm

Starting on August 26, student meals will be available for pick up on all school days. Please continue to check your email and social media for further information on meal pick up.

If you would like to read a summary of the IDPH updated guidance, please read below.

Thank you, as always, for your ongoing support and patience.

Sincerely,

Dr. Mark T. Fleming
Superintendent

#Worth127StrongerTogether

The following is a summary of the most significant updates:

If a student is sent home sick with suspected COVID-19 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-19, 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.

All students and staff sent 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 COVID-like symptoms (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 Cook 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 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.

What PPE is required by school nurses who are assessing a student or staff member reporting COVID-like symptoms?

When performing clinical evaluation of a sick individual, school nurses will use enhanced droplet and contact transmission-based precautions. Staff performing this evaluation should use appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) including:

- **Fit-tested N95 respirator**
- Eye protection with face shield or goggles
- Gown
- Gloves

Any staff member who may be involved in the assessment or clinical evaluation of a student or staff member with COVID-like symptoms should be trained on the type of PPE required and how to don (put on) and doff (remove) it correctly and safely. Respirators such as N95s must be used as part of a written respiratory protection program. OSHA requires that N95 masks be fit tested prior to use. This is an important step to ensure a tight fit for the mask to be effective in providing protection.

What kind of PPE is required for staff who clean areas used by a suspected or known COVID case?

Personnel responsible for cleaning areas used by an individual known or suspected to have COVID-19 should use appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) including:

- **Fit-tested N95 respirator**
- Eye protection with face shield or goggles
- Gown
- Gloves

A close contact has been *redefined* 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 August 12, 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 - especially in a jr. high school where students could share time in a passing period, on a bus, or in a classroom. Figuring out how to account for this new running clock for anyone who a student or staff member may have come into close contact will take additional planning that was not accounted for in our original plan.