



Otto-Eldred School District

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August 16, 2021

Dear Otto-Eldred Families,

After our board meeting last week, I wanted to send out an update of our planning and hopeful direction as we start the school year on Thursday, August 26th. Nothing has changed on our Health & Safety Plan posted on our website (ottoeldred.org); however, an addendum has been included online to provide additional specifics that may help answer some questions. Uncertainty is growing in many areas about this Fall. The information below will help all understand what we know and what we are following:

CDC Updates - Guidance has been updated in many areas, including for schools. Please keep in mind, many areas of our country did not see students return to school for in-person learning. Some areas experienced a very brief period of students in school. The guidance is geared toward getting kids back to in-person learning and keeping them there. Our area was "in-person" for the vast majority of last year. O-E experienced very minimal disruptions. Currently, all guidance is recommended, not required. The only requirement we have is masking on school transportation.

Our Main Mitigation Efforts - We will continue to focus on "in-person" instruction and the health of our students and staff. Maintaining "in-person" instruction may call for additional efforts, but there will still need to be a balance with the educational impact, developmental impact, and personal impact. There is concern that by providing choice (in masks or vaccination), bullying or peer-pressure may be a result. We will expect all to be respectful of individual choices and perspectives. There will be zero-tolerance for anyone (adults or students) contributing to an environment that is not supportive and safe for all.

- Cleaning/Sanitizing - This will remain as we did last year.
- Ventilation - Least intrusive and very effective! This opportunity is seasonal, based on weather and opportunity to add filtering solution to areas. We will open windows, open doors, use outdoor spaces as much as it makes sense.
- Spacing/Distancing - This is also very effective. We need to balance learning needs of students and the health/safety needs of everyone. We aren't back to "normal", but we won't require separation by 6 feet, either. The more we distance, the less we must focus on other efforts and the less we will identify close contacts.
- Health Monitoring - We will not be screening students as they enter school. We will ask parents to monitor students for symptoms and keep their child home if they exhibit symptoms of COVID (or other illnesses). The chart we will reference is included in this mailing. Understandably, it is not ideal for parents to plan for sick/symptomatic students while at home. From a broader view, limiting sickness at school will help us maintain "in-person" instruction.

- Masks - This is still voluntary, based on student/parent/staff choice. It will be impossible to track parent choice as it relates to student choice to mask while at school. We can maintain communication with parents as much as possible, but if the parent desires their student to mask, that will need to be conveyed to their child(ren) consistently at home. The CDC has recommended mask mandates for all in areas of Substantial or High Transmission. We will continue to watch the data and understand what it means for us. Focusing on the other known and effective mitigation efforts (cleaning, ventilation/distancing) will reduced the focus on the need/requirement for masks. IF we do see increased cases locally, it is possible that masking may be required (or highly recommended) on a temporary basis. Per our safety plan, I can implement this change, but then will discuss the further need of this mitigation effort at the next school board meeting. We will have masks on hand for those needing one. Currently, law requires students/staff to mask while on school transportation. Please plan to send masks with your student each day for the purpose of riding on a school van or bus. We will provide masks to those that forget.
- Vaccinations - Any medical treatment/procedure/preventative technique will come with hesitancy. Right now, vaccines are voluntary for 12 and up. Once it is fully approved by the FDA, will it be required? Will there be an "opt out" provision, as currently exists for other vaccines? This will be something we have to watch. We do see effectiveness of this mitigation technique. Those vaccinated will not need quarantined if caught in a trace unless the person is symptomatic. Only the nurse or administration will collect vaccination status (voluntarily) from staff or parents. Unvaccinated individuals would be considered close contacts and only exempt if other mitigation efforts are in place (distancing, increased ventilation, masking, etc.). Any parent needing more information about access to a COVID-19 vaccine should contact your primary care physician or your local pharmacy.

Contact Tracing / Quarantine - We expect to receive updated guidance from PA DOH on our expected role in contact tracing and case reporting. As of now, we plan to operate very similar to last year. We will explore all flexibility that is appropriate to minimize the amount of time that staff or students would need quarantined and removed from school.

Learning Options - As we start the year, we are not establishing a synchronous "live" option for students to access classroom instruction. We are planning for "in-person" instruction throughout the year. Online course options are available via an application basis. Student success is our focus. We truly believe that students are much more successful when students are in school. If there is interest in discussing an online course option, administration will discuss the need and potential for success in that environment. Our Microsoft Office tools will provide students access to course materials via Teams and/or email. If there is a need or requirement to move to remote instruction, those tools plus Zoom will continue to be used to connect with students. Based on student need, we anticipate having a limited number of students in our building if we move to remote instruction. Additionally, after school tutoring sessions will be available in each building multiple times per week in person and via Zoom.

We were successful last year due to the efforts of our staff, families, and community. We are hoping for a more "normal" school year but understand there are still COVID challenges we will face. Your help to prepare your students for the year is appreciated. It is important for us to support parents in your choices (masks, vaccine, etc.) as they relate to our planning. I will continue to communicate updates throughout the year. Please do not hesitate to reach out if you have any questions, comments, or concerns. We look forward to opening our doors on August 26th!

Sincerely,



Matthew D. Splain
Superintendent

MDS/ss