



Update from the Superintendent

To: Parents and Guardians
From: Bill Husfelt, Superintendent
Date: February 21, 2021

As you know, Bay District Schools is firmly committed to doing all we can to ensure the safety of our students and staff during any challenge – that includes our current situation with a global pandemic. To that end, our School Board voted last summer to follow the CDC guidelines when it comes to mask wearing, social distancing and quarantining. Since that vote, we've done our best to adhere to those guidelines and our work seems to be paying off in that the positivity rate in our schools has remained in the low single digits despite higher numbers in the community as a whole.

That hasn't come, however, without some HUGE sacrifices on the part of our students, staff and families, some of whom have had to quarantine multiple times after being identified as close contacts. While we want to do all we can to focus on safety, it's become very clear to us that Covid-19 is NOT spreading in our classrooms. Most of the positive cases and student-to-student transmission that we encounter are the result of after-school, evening and weekend activities NOT casual contact in the classroom setting where students and staff are masked appropriately.

With that in mind, at the February 23rd School Board meeting, I am going to ask the board to deviate slightly from the CDC guidelines when it comes to the quarantining requirement for our students.

Specifically, I am going to request that we use a three-foot rule instead of a six-foot rule when determining which students need to quarantine. Only students within three feet of a known case of Covid-19 for more than 15 minutes would have to quarantine IF the School Board approves my recommendation. We will continue to advise adults to remain six feet away as much as possible.

Lyndsey Jackson, Supervisory School Nurse, and I believe that we have enough data points and valid reasoning to move the bar from the CDC 'guideline' from 6 to 3 feet for student quarantining purposes. "In reviewing our data, we consistently find very little transmission from student to student in the classroom or on the bus as a whole," according to Nurse Jackson. "The school-related transmission we see is mainly limited to extra-curricular activities and the activities students are doing on the weekends or after school."

I approach this request with some trepidation. I recognize that it's a HUGE step to deviate from the CDC guidelines but BDS has been working in the background for MONTHS trying to get the Florida Department of Health to change the guidelines on the state level to no avail. We've also

heard from countless health professionals who support this adjustment but, unfortunately, are not in positions where they can speak "on the record."

I'm a voracious reader and a diligent researcher and I've discovered several communities and states across the country who are noticing what we're noticing and who are taking the same steps that I am recommending. If you'd like to read more on the topic, I suggest you start with the new decisions for Indiana schools and for some school districts in parts of Ohio.

I am as concerned about the safety of our staff as anyone else and I would not make this recommendation if I thought it would unnecessarily expose them to any more risk than is already there. What I know for sure is that we cannot continue to quarantine massive numbers of students who may, or may not, have the ability to connect digitally from home to lessons they need to pass, to be promoted and to graduate.

There is absolutely NO DOUBT in my mind, and I hope in yours by now, that digital/virtual instruction is a poor substitute for in-person education for most students.

I just can't continue to sit idly by while so many students miss out on valuable instruction and so many teachers struggle to deliver high-quality virtual lessons from home while on quarantine.

Change is hard, and change is not without challenge, but I firmly believe that changing our quarantine guidelines makes sense for us, for right now, in our community. Only we know the low rates of transmission in our community schools and only we know the true impact multiple quarantines are having on our students.

The time to change is now and I wholeheartedly hope that my recommendation is endorsed by the School Board members and by our community which, I know, places a high priority on what's best for our students and for our schools.

Stay safe and God Bless!