



Update from the Superintendent

To: Parents and Guardians
From: Bill Husfelt, Superintendent
Date: March 28, 2021

I don't think anyone in a leadership role in our community could have imagined we'd be dealing with a global pandemic on the heels of Hurricane Michael but, and this is important, there's no one better positioned to lead Bay County through a crisis than some of those people who were at the helm during our category 5 hurricane.

Working together on bi-weekly calls and an almost constant thread of communication, county leaders are continuously tracking the data from Covid-19 so they can use that data to inform decision making for our community. Data-driven decisions, after all, are always better than unplanned reactions.

And it's that very same data-driven approach that prompted Bay District Schools to decide several weeks ago to limit the STUDENT quarantine circles in our schools to students within three feet of a positive case. After watching the data for months, and realizing there's virtually no student-to-student spread at our schools, we made the decision to shrink the quarantine circle to three feet instead of six feet and that has really reduced the education disruption for so many of our students and families.

We didn't shrink the quarantine circle for our adults, nor are we applying this new rule to situations that occur outside of our classrooms, but our data shows us that the three foot approach in the classroom and on the bus is the right thing to do for our students. This revised protocol doesn't mean we're not still trying to social distance as much as possible, and it has no impact on our use of masks when social distancing isn't possible, but it does help us keep students in school while also ensuring our classrooms are as safe as possible for students and employees.

Interestingly enough, the CDC (which obviously has access to national and international data) recently came to the same conclusion and is now recommending just a three foot quarantine/social distancing circle in communities like ours that have low community spread and universal masking in schools.

While we're thrilled that the CDC guidelines have changed to reflect what we know already to be best for students, the School Board was confident in making their own data-driven decision weeks ago because we know what's going on in our schools and in our community.

We work daily with our trusted partners at the Florida Department of Education in Tallahassee, the Florida Department of Health in Bay County, PanCare, Ascension Sacred Heart, Gulf Coast Regional Medical Center and others to make important decisions. Since schools reopened in August, we've kept a laser-like focus on the data and on making decisions that provide the safest environment possible for our students, our employees and the families of Bay County. You can track our data, updated twice a week, on our website at <https://www.bay.k12.fl.us/COVID%2019>

I'm also eternally grateful to those same partners who have gone out of their way to ensure our employees have access to the vaccines they want to further protect themselves.

A couple of months ago I wrote about vaccines but purposefully didn't say whether or not I was going to get the vaccine because I don't ever want to be seen as trying to influence someone one way or the other regarding such a personal decision. In actuality, I got my first vaccine two weeks ago *after* I was sure that all employees who wanted a shot had been given ample opportunity to get one thanks to our trusted partners. As a lifelong educator, it's my job to teach people and to provide education where I can but it's not my job to advocate that anyone take one specific path over another when it comes to personal health choices.

We don't make any of our decisions in isolation and we're going to continue to review our locally-generated data to determine our current and future responses to the pandemic. If nothing else, I think Covid-19 has taught us all to be flexible, to be grateful and to appreciate the freedoms that we so often take for granted. Those are takeaways from this pandemic that I hope we all savor. There are plenty of things about the pandemic that I can't wait to put behind us but I do want to remember the incredible sacrifices of our educators, administrators and support personnel and the impressive resilience of our students who have risen to every challenge this pandemic has laid before them.

I know the resilience of our students is due, in large part, to the incredible support of their families, our educators, our support employees and our administrators. It's amazing to me to read about the struggles other communities are facing when it comes to RE-OPENING schools that have been closed since last March when our schools have been open this entire school year. That, in and of itself, is a testament to the strength of our system, the dedication of our employees and the support of our families.

Thank you for trusting us with your children, thank you for continuing to support our employees and thank you for your faith in public education.

Stay safe and God Bless!