

# Update from the Superintendent

To: Parents and Guardians  
From: Bill Husfelt, Superintendent  
Date: September 3, 2021

There has been a lot in the news lately about Covid-19 protocols and the ways we are trying to prevent the spread of Covid in our schools. I thought I'd take a few minutes this week to make sure that we're all on the same page about our processes and procedures and to ensure you have correct information from a reliable source.

First of all, you should know, all of our procedures and protocols come to us from the state. Both the Florida Department of Education and the Florida Department of Health are directing schools throughout the state during this pandemic and, as you can see from the decision tree, each step is clearly outlined.

Masks are optional in our schools and we do not, and have not ever, required Covid-19 vaccines for students or staff. However, both students and staff have the option to provide proof of vaccination IF they choose to do so in order to avoid quarantining after exposure if they don't have symptoms. If students or staff prefer not to provide proof to the district they can just follow the state's quarantine protocols.

Likewise, students and staff DO NOT have to provide proof of previous infection within 90 days but can choose to do so to take a different path in the event of an exposure without symptoms.

In all cases when proof is provided, it's optional, confidential and completely voluntary on the part of the student/parent or staff member. **Documentation is required, however, if someone wants to use either vaccination status or previous infection as a reason not to quarantine.** At this point, quarantine is one of the most effective strategies we have to prevent the spread of Covid-19 in our schools and we want to ensure that those exposed who should quarantine are doing so. In all cases where a quarantine exemption is being requested, **documentation is required.**

That's not to say that we think quarantining is easy on anyone.

We don't.

We hate making the calls for students to quarantine as much as we know their parents and guardians hate receiving them. But we must contact trace, we must call, we must quarantine because those are the state guidelines we must follow.

If I could ask one thing of our community this week it would be for parents and guardians to please remember that **NONE OF US LIKE THIS.** None of our administrators went into education to become contact tracers and to send kids home to quarantine. In fact, most of our educators have spent their entire careers working on increasing attendance and encouraging students to attend school every day. Sending children home, and disrupting the lives of their families, is **NOT** what we like to do but it's what we have to do.

So please, give us a break! If someone you know gets a call, encourage the receiver to be kind to the employee on the other end of the phone. Please understand our employees are doing the best job possible in some incredibly difficult circumstance. We know this situation is causing untold stress on our students, on our staff and on our families but we must figure out how to work together through these challenges.

We continue to communicate regularly with area medical professionals who are truly the frontline heroes treating Covid-19 patients in their offices and in our hospitals. They share our dedication to doing what we can to keep our students and staff as safe as possible and they support our contact tracing and quarantining efforts.

I do a lot of reading and research every day, in addition to talking with our area medical providers and the local Department of Health, and I know firsthand how confusing it can be to read conflicting reports, strategies, suggestions and “advice”. Take masks, for example, as just one aspect of Covid-19 that generates controversy. If you read <https://nymag.com/intelligencer/2021/08/the-science-of-masking-kids-at-school-remains-uncertain.html>, you would probably come to the conclusion that masks don't really help. However, you can read <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/08/10/opinion/covid-schools-masks.html> and come to a completely different conclusion.

And therein lies the true struggle. We are all searching for THE ONE expert we can trust, the science we understand and the path that makes sense to us. Unfortunately, that's a pipe dream and the best we can do is read a lot, research those sources, talk to our own trusted healthcare providers and make the best decisions possible for our own loved ones.

And know that we, at Bay District Schools, are following the state's protocols outlined in great detail by the decision tree from the Florida Department of Education.

I wish we could know when this would all be over and we could return to “normal” but the truth is that many experts believe Covid-19 is here forever. You can read more about that here: <https://www.theatlantic.com/science/archive/2021/08/how-we-live-coronavirus-forever/619783/>

Thank you for your continued support of Bay District Schools and the more than 3,300 hard-working men and women who have dedicated their lives to the education of our children.

Stay safe and God Bless!