

SUTHERLAND Public Schools

Dear Students, Parents and Stakeholders,

I have spent many sleepless nights thinking and pondering about the best way to keep our students and staff as safe as we can from COVID throughout this school year. My priority remains consistent - keeping our school doors open and providing effective, in-person instruction. As a result, the administrative team and I have made several telephone calls to the West Central Health District in North Platte asking for clarity, guidance, and direction. We have also contacted doctors, nurses, and medical clinics for advice. Likewise, we have called multiple area schools and asked about their COVID safety plans, each of which provided varying responses and plans. Also notable, in a recent Zoom meeting with several Superintendents from across the state of Nebraska, there were again many varying approaches to how they were handling COVID within their building. Ultimately, through all of our research, we found there are no clear answers and a lack of clear direction on how to best approach preventative COVID measures.

I've preached the approach of common sense, which I still believe in, and no matter the decision to mask or not to mask, I could argue either decision equally. At this point I can tell you what we can control and later what we can't control. At the start of the year we opened school as "normal." Desks were in pods where students could pair/share with each other. At lunch, students could sit next to each other and cleaning and sanitizing was back to a pre-COVID routine.

Now each room is equipped with additional Lysol disinfectant spray, hand sanitizer, and Clorox wipes. Hand sanitizer is now being used with all students as they enter the classroom in the morning and after lunch. Students wipe down their desk surfaces with Clorox wipes and we are doing our best to social distance students and staff. If a student is not feeling well, each teacher has their own digital thermometer in their classroom. The custodial staff has beefed up their cleaning routines and the electrostatic cleaning tool is being used more frequently. Elementary students go to recess and then wash their hands prior to lunch. The older students are going outdoors immediately after eating. Beyond these measures would be to ask all students and staff to mask up. Currently, it is recommended that staff and students wear masks which is their choice. If our cases of COVID at school are on the rise we may require all students and staff to mask up.



If you choose or not choose to get vaccinated that choice is yours. However, West Central Health District has provided information on if a student or staff member should show signs of COVID or test positive. In either case we will follow West Central's advice.

Students, staff, and educators who have been in close contact with someone who has COVID-19 should receive diagnostic testing and should begin quarantine. In general, a close contact means being less than 3-6 feet from someone for 15 minutes or more throughout a 24-hour period. However, even shorter periods of time or longer distances can result in spread of the virus.

Exceptions include:

- **Someone who has been fully** vaccinated and shows no symptoms of COVID-19 does **NOT** need to quarantine, but should be tested 3-5 days following a known exposure to someone with suspected or confirmed COVID-19.
 - and wear a mask in public indoor settings for 14 days or until they receive a negative test result.

- **If you are masked and fully vaccinated** and have had close contact with someone who has COVID-19,
 - This is **NOT** considered an exposure.

- **If you are NOT fully vaccinated and NOT masked** and have had close contact with someone who has COVID-19, you need to stay home and away from others (quarantine).
 - You can get tested on or after day 5. If your test is negative you may be able to discontinue in-home quarantine on day 8, if you don't have symptoms.
 - With a negative test: If you have no symptoms on or before day 7 and tested negative on or after day 5, you can discontinue in-home quarantine on day 8.
 - You must keep wearing your mask at all times and monitor for symptoms through day 14.

- **If you are masked and NOT fully vaccinated** and have had close contact with someone who has COVID-19.
 - You need to mask up for 14-days and monitor for symptoms through day 14.
 - See above for testing

What we can't control is students playing together after school or on weekends without masks, slumber parties/sleepovers or fans at sporting events who refuse to mask up or who take their masks off during the event. We also can't control if someone tells us they have been vaccinated when actually they haven't.

To conclude, I'm going back to common sense. Even if you disagree with an administrative decision, all decisions will be weighed out with the end goal of keeping our children, staff and community safe and to keep our school open with effective in person learning.

Sincerely,

Mr. Bristol
Superintendent