

April 26, 2021

Jill Hunsaker Ryan  
Executive Director, CDPHE  
Sent Via Email

Re: School Quarantine Requirements

It's time to eliminate mandatory COVID quarantines in Colorado's schools.

Messaging from Colorado's public health and elected officials has acknowledged, since before the new year, that rates of COVID transmission within our schools are low; that the mitigation measures we have in place are working; and that in-person schooling is critically important for many students in their social, emotional, and academic development. Similar findings have been made throughout the country, and at this juncture at least 11 states -- Ohio, Utah, Missouri, Texas, Nebraska, Oklahoma, Iowa, Wyoming, New Hampshire, North Dakota, and Indiana -- have eliminated prior quarantine rules that resulted in large numbers of students being removed from in-person schooling each time they have a school exposure to a COVID positive individual. Several of these states took these steps before the onset of the new year. In-school COVID transmission remains low in each of these jurisdictions, and none of them has needed to rescind their new response protocols because of a surge in COVID activity.

Many of us have been advocating for an end to school quarantine rules since before the spring break period and have heard that rescission of the quarantine rules was premature because of concerns about COVID variants and fears that school transmission would markedly increase as secondary school students moved from hybrid schooling models to more densely occupied classroom environments. More than a dozen Colorado school districts have been collecting data regarding in-school COVID transmission throughout the second semester, and the data show that in-school transmission remains extremely low notwithstanding the presence of COVID variants in our state and even after the transition from hybrid schooling models in mid-March to early April. Our most recent data compiled on April 23 shows that less than one half of one percent of students and staff placed into quarantine since January have subsequently tested positive for the virus -- and the rates are not increasing over the past month.

The frequent school quarantines have caused constant disruption to classroom environments, stress for students preparing for end of year exams, and a lack of predictability and consistency in almost every facet of a student's school experience. More than 3000 students per week have been completing quarantines over the past two weeks across the 13 districts currently participating in the COVID data reporting effort -- and their COVID infection rate has been less than two tenths of one percent.

If the existing quarantine rules remain in place as we head into the final month of the school year, we estimate that 10-20 percent of our students could find themselves sent home on quarantine at some time before summer break commences. Those quarantines would be on top of others that students and families have had to navigate throughout the school year. The most extreme case of which we're aware concerns a student sent home on quarantine six times throughout the year, but we have many students across our districts who have been out on quarantine two to three times this year and have had a choppy, inconsistent school experience. The protective health benefits for these students from quarantines have been small -- and the costs to their development and academic progress have been great. The stakes will

grow larger as participation in graduation ceremonies and planned in-person participation in advanced placement exams becomes at risk due to quarantine requirements.

We urge the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment to take prompt action to rescind current school quarantine standards and replace them with protocols adopted in the states referenced above. The combination of continued indoor masking for students and staff members; home isolation of COVID positive staff and students; and directives that symptomatic individuals stay home has proven effective elsewhere in maintaining low rates of in-school COVID transmission. If similar standards are quickly adopted here, we can give tens of thousands of students the opportunity to finish the school year with consistency, predictability, and focus that they'll otherwise lose out on as they get on and off the quarantine carousel.

Your acknowledgement of this letter, and your anticipated timeline for providing a substantive response or change to existing school quarantine practice, would be appreciated by the close of business on April 27, 2021.

Sincerely,

Chris Gdowski, Superintendent, Adams 12 Five Star Schools  
Douglas Bissonette, Superintendent, Elizabeth School District  
Charlotte Ciancio, Superintendent, Mapleton School District  
Tracy Dorland, Superintendent, Jeffco Public Schools  
Brian Ewert, Superintendent, Littleton Public Schools  
Chris Fiedler, Superintendent, 27J Schools  
Rico Munn, Superintendent, Aurora Public Schools  
Wendy Rubin, Superintendent, Englewood Schools  
Mike Schmidt, Superintendent, Platte Canyon School District  
Scott Siegfried, Superintendent, Cherry Creek School District  
Pam Swanson, Superintendent, Westminster Public Schools  
Corey Wise, Superintendent, Douglas County School District

Attachment: Semester Two Aggregate Data Regarding Student/Staff Quarantines from Colorado School Districts

Cc:

Dr. Eric France, Chief Medical Officer, CDPHE  
Governor Jared Polis

Lisa Kaufmann, Chief of Staff to Governor Polis

Alana Plaus, Advisor to Governor Polis

Dr. John Douglas, Executive Director, Tri County Public Health and Co-Chair, Metro Denver Partnership for Health

Jason Vahling, Director, Broomfield Public Health and Co-Chair, Metro Denver Partnership for Health