



# Knob Noster R-VIII School District

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## Our Mission Is Student Success

Date: 11-12-2020

To: Knob Noster Parents and Students

From: Jerrod Wheeler

RE: COVID Updates

Dear Parents and Students,

It has been several weeks since my last COVID-19 memo. Overall, things have been going relatively well in our schools. However, there are currently a number of timely updates that I want to share with you as we head into the home stretch for first semester, so you can remain up-to-date on our protocols.

First, I want to again send a heartfelt thank you from our team to each of you for your ongoing partnership. While we see and hear of elevated levels of conflict on the issue of COVID-19 in surrounding communities, we continue to experience a strong, united front throughout our school district and across the Knob Noster / Whiteman AFB community. Thank you for your cooperation and for continuing to bring any feedback or concerns directly to our attention so that we may evaluate and respond. Working together, we are making it through this challenging time! Below are key updates as we look ahead.

### Online Dashboard and Trends to Date

Our online dashboard continues to be updated each Friday on our district website. This dashboard provides numerical data on current positive cases and close contacts in each of our buildings. The dashboard does not provide context on the transmission rate for close contacts, so I want to provide a few important details. We are seeing an overall transmission rate near 3%, with almost every transmission case being traced back to in-home transmission among family members and other close relationships. To date, we have placed over 400 students in quarantine as close contacts. The online dashboard can be viewed at the following link:

[http://www.knobnoster.k12.mo.us/p\\_a\\_r\\_e\\_n\\_t\\_s/return\\_to\\_school\\_plan\\_2020/c\\_o\\_v\\_i\\_d-19\\_dashboard](http://www.knobnoster.k12.mo.us/p_a_r_e_n_t_s/return_to_school_plan_2020/c_o_v_i_d-19_dashboard)

Our data appears to be consistent with what we are hearing from our state-level authorities, specifically as it relates to the prevalence of transmission within the extended family unit. We believe the success within our schools is attributed in large part to the lower prevalence of COVID spread among youth AND the successful impact of the use of face coverings in our schools to reduce the spread of the virus. Overall, our students have done a great job of following the face covering mandate. We thank you for your support with this effort!

### Governor Parson Announces Change on Close Contact Tracing in Schools

This morning, Governor Parson held a press conference in partnership with our Missouri Commissioner of Education, Department of Health and Senior Services, and other officials. He announced a significant change, directing that schools are no longer required to place students or staff in quarantine IF both parties are appropriately wearing a proper face covering. To be clear, this means that, while in school, even if an individual meets the CDC definition of a Close Contact (6 feet or less for 15 minutes or more to a person who later tests positive) that individual will not be required to quarantine as long as proper face coverings were in place and the individual remains asymptomatic.

Our district nurses are reviewing our current close contacts in each building and are reaching out individually to parents and employees who may return to school due to this change. Please keep in mind that many of our quarantined individuals are not in quarantine as a result of contact in school. Accordingly, not all students or employees will be permitted to immediately return to school. Household close contacts continue to produce the highest rate of transmission and those cases are not impacted by this change in protocol. In all cases, anyone returning to school must be asymptomatic.

### **Impact for Students Living on Whiteman AFB AND for Students who Attend Whiteman Elementary**

The district immediately collaborated this morning with officials from Whiteman AFB Public Health to ensure alignment. At this time, we were informed that The Governor's restrictions DO NOT apply to students who live on base or students who attend Whiteman Elementary School. We will continue to follow CDC guidelines for close contact tracing and quarantine for these students. (Approximately 600 of our 1800 students). Public Health invited that any follow up questions be directed to their department on base.

### **Flu Season Impacts**

As we approach flu season, we want to again remind everyone to STAY HOME if you are sick or showing any symptoms that could be related to the flu or to COVID-19. All other precautions aside, this is critically-important every year, but especially this year. Our team is fully committed to helping your child catch up on any work missed due to illness.

### **It's The Most Wonderful Time of the Year**

This year, we have seen one spike in cases and we are currently experiencing a smaller increase in positive cases. We have attributed both of these trends, in part, to larger gatherings that included adult populations. (Homecoming Activities and Halloween Activities, respectively). As we head into the Thanksgiving, Christmas, and New Year's holidays, we strongly encourage our families to use precautions during gatherings. Data proves that transmission and significant illness is occurring predominately in our adult populations. Please keep this in mind as you interact with your family and friends and please follow the known safety precautions (social distance, face coverings, and hand washing) that will help protect all individuals. The season can still be safely celebrated with proper precautions, and these moments are dear to all of us. Just keep in mind that our collective actions during the holiday season will have many immediate impacts, and potentially many long-lasting ones. As in most things, making good decisions is key.

### **Second Semester Plans**

As of today, our plan is to continue into second semester as we did with first semester. We will continue to offer in-person and virtual learning options for all students. A survey will be sent to parents within the next week to allow parents to choose the delivery option (in-person or virtual) for their children during second semester. The only significant difference to expect is the district will carefully evaluate individual student performance at the conclusion of first semester. We unfortunately do have a small number of students who are not engaging and who are not experiencing success in virtual learning for a variety of reasons. State law allows districts to deny the request for virtual learning if it is determined that this setting is not in the best interest of the student. Our team continues to take a variety of efforts and actions to support all students, including all students who have selected virtual learning delivery. We remain on standby to assist parents and students in any way we can.

### **Spectators for Sports and Activities**

One area of concern that has been troublesome this year is the lackluster compliance regarding the use of face coverings by adult spectators during after school activities. As we transition from primarily outdoor sports to

indoor sports during the winter season, we are taking additional precautions and more stringent steps to enforce the current public health order which mandates face coverings when moving about indoors or when within six feet of another individual. Anyone failing to abide by the order may be denied access or may be asked to leave an event. Food and drinks may also be prohibited during these events, if it is used to avoid compliance with the mask mandate.

In addition, in order to further reduce the chance of contracting or spreading the virus, spectators at school events will be limited for the winter season. Each student participant will receive two tickets per event, which they can distribute to family or friends at their discretion. Some exceptions will be made for special events, for example, Senior Nights. This limitation on spectators is consistent with the actions of all other schools in the MRVC.

For tournaments hosted by Knob Noster, specific restrictions will also apply. For instance, the Ray Stockdale Invitational Wrestling Tournament is currently scheduled to include 10 schools with a target of eight full slates of wrestlers. In this instance, we will have specific and stringent restrictions on spectators. Please keep in mind our goal is to allow our students to participate in sporting events to the fullest extent possible. However, we know a large, mixed, crowded group of adult populations poses significant risk to our students, employees, and adults.

I am respectfully asking that all parents reevaluate these protocols and restrictions and try to set personal opinions aside regarding masks and group gatherings. Getting through this COVID challenge is a give and take. The more we can reasonably take as adults, the more opportunities we can reasonably give to our students. Working together, I believe we can get through the winter season with reduced risk and maximized involvement for students and their families.

### **Hospital Staffing**

We are carefully monitoring the metrics related to the increasing demand being placed on our hospitals. We will continue to take this data and other metrics into consideration as we move forward a day at a time. We continue to keep our medical professionals in our thoughts as they tackle this issue head on each day.

### **Happy Thanksgiving!**

Thank you for taking time to review this lengthy memo. Once again, we thank you for your ongoing partnership and two-way communication as we work through this evolving situation. Please do not hesitate to reach out with any questions or feedback. From the Knob Noster team to you and your family, we wish you a happy and safe Thanksgiving Holiday!

Very Respectfully,

Jerrold Wheeler