



Dave Koch, Director

To: Iowa Department of Education
Iowa Department of Public Health

From: Dave Koch, Director
Johnson County Public Health

Date: July 21, 2020

Re: Support for the local decision of the Iowa City Community School District

On July 15, the Iowa City Community School District Board of Director's voted unanimously to begin the 2020/2021 school year in an off-site remote learning environment. This decision did not come easily or without frustration. The decision came with consultation and support from our department given our current local situation and assessment of many factors in Johnson County.

On July 17, Governor Reynolds issued a proclamation that requires the Iowa Department of Education, in consultation with the Iowa Department of Public Health, to approve the temporary move to primarily remote learning for an entire building or district because of public health conditions.

This requirement removes the ability for the local school district to make the safest decision for their stakeholders, students, families, teachers, and the community. It is in this department's professional opinion that the decision should be made locally as it not only requires a statewide or regional assessment of capacity, but a local assessment capacity, which is best performed by the school Board of Director's in consultation with school leadership and their local partners.

Johnson County Public Health writes in support of the Iowa City Community School District decision for 100% remote learning with monthly evaluation to move to a hybrid learning model with the anticipated transition date of October 6, 2020.

This decision is based on the following information:

- Johnson County is home to the University of Iowa which intends to start their school year in-person and will bring several thousand students and visitors from different areas who are also experiencing surges in COVID-19 cases, and there are currently no travel restrictions or quarantine requirements upon arrival.
- Our local surge in cases throughout July was started in and propagated by the young adult (18-24) population within the county. Based on the results of our case investigations and contact tracing interviews we strongly believe that we will experience another, larger surge in cases as students return, and that illness will spread not only in students but throughout the community.
- To contextualize the risk posed to their staff and faculty:
 - "What number of staff are at higher risk for severe disease? (i.e. those who fall into specific categories at higher risk described by the CDC e.g. age and/or underlying condition)
 - "What number of children have an underlying condition that poses them at higher risk for severe disease?"

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- Given the combination of all schools in Iowa potentially required to start the school year in-person in some capacity and some colleges and universities across the state and nation also planning to start the school year in-person, is the local school district able to manage operations if absenteeism increases in staff or support staff or if those persons are placed in isolation and quarantine abruptly?
- The Johnson County healthcare system is a regional hub for excellent medical care and draws patients across the nation, while we know the healthcare community is well prepared to withstand a surge in cases that may likely occur regionally, our collective efforts should strive to prevent a surge from occurring
- There needs to be a plan in place for testing in schools as symptomatic cases that are not tested are to be treated as cases.
 - Long-term care and older adult facilities would likely be the highest priority given this populations poorer outcomes with COVID-19. Other factors include the stringent requirements to allow visitors, which many of them desire to transition to, with the phased approach provided by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services and the Iowa Department of Inspection and Appeals i.e. serial facility wide testing.
 - Universities and Colleges may be offered strategically placed testing supplies which also draw upon testing capacity.
 - The increased demand in testing may cause significant delay in receiving results which will negate the point of getting tested.
- The Iowa Departments of Public Health and Education are currently working on forthcoming guidance, but time is of the essence and at minimum school districts need ample time to execute their thoughtful plans adequately. As such, a temporary waiver for at least one (1) month is necessary to ensure the health and wellbeing of all parties involved.

Other evidence to guide our understanding and determination is also predicated on information produced by the Center for Disease Control and Prevention and other collected information:

- [Population Point Prevalence of SARS-CoV-2 Infection Based on a Statewide Random Sample — Indiana, April 25–29, 2020](#)
 - It is estimated that many persons may remain susceptible and that adherence to evidence-based public health mitigation measures is needed to reduce a surge in hospitalizations and prevent morbidity and mortality.
- [Absence of Apparent Transmission of SARS-CoV-2 from Two Stylists After Exposure at a Hair Salon with a Universal Face Covering Policy — Springfield, Missouri, May 2020](#)
 - Professional and social interactions present more opportunities for transmission and that face covering policies mitigate the spread of infection.
- [Increases in Health-Related Workplace Absenteeism Among Workers in Essential Critical Infrastructure Occupations During the COVID-19 Pandemic — United States, March–April 2020](#)
 - Many essential service jobs involve prolonged close contact with patients, the general public, or coworkers and that these workers may likely be required to be physically present in their workplaces and will not be able to avoid exposure, thus at increased risk for occupational exposure.
- [COVID-19 Outbreak Among College Students After a Spring Break Trip to Mexico — Austin, Texas, March 26–April 5, 2020](#)
 - Due to COVID-19 causing asymptomatic and mild illness, particularly among young and healthy populations, transmission has led to large outbreaks and the CDC notes testing and contact tracing are important for colleges and universities and leads this department to believe it should also include schools should they be required to be in-person.

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- Currently, the statewide testing framework only allows children in daycare settings with symptoms to be eligible for public health laboratory testing.
- [Evidence for Limited Early Spread of COVID-19 Within the United States, January–February 2020](#)
 - If evidence suggests that limited transmission occurred early on and coupled with the estimation that many persons remain susceptible, it is reasonable to suspect that many of our school colleagues may be at risk as well;
 - Children were not eligible for public health laboratory testing until May 15, 2020 and though persons of any age were included in the March 25, 2020 update, these persons either had to be hospitalized or a resident in a congregate setting. It is reasonable to suspect that many school aged children may be at risk as well.
- [High COVID-19 Attack Rate Among Attendees at Events at a Church — Arkansas, March 2020](#)
 - Large gatherings pose a risk for transmission.
- [Summary of School Re-Opening Models and Implementation Approaches During the COVID-19 Pandemic](#)
 - Several strategies are listed on school re-opening and provide insight in regards to public health and safety measures implemented.
- [SARS-COV-2 Infection in Children](#)
 - Asymptomatic infection in children was not uncommon.
- [Children returning to schools following COVID-19: A balance of probabilities – Letter to the Editor](#)
 - While children may have better outcomes in terms of COVID-19, they may have a higher amount of social contacts, and this poses a concern for potential transmission.
- [Low-income children and Coronavirus Disease 2019 \(COVID-19\) in the US](#)
 - Recognizing that increased absenteeism affects educational outcomes, it is suspected that if in-person re-opening were to occur while the situation in Johnson County remains unknown but an anticipated increase of cases is presumed given the University resuming in-person, and that sporadic outbreaks in classrooms were to happen, given the updated CDC guidance that states re-exposure of symptomatic persons within a three (3) month timeline should be isolated again if symptoms develop within 14 days after close contact with a new COVID-19 case, knowing classes are over 15 minutes and that six (6) foot physical distancing may not be achieved, children who tested positive and recovered, within a 3 month timeline, who had close contact with a positive case and developed symptoms, would need to isolate again for at least 10 days
- [Reopening Schools Safely: The Case for Collaboration, Constructive Disruption of Pre-Coronavirus 2019 Expectations, and Creative Solutions](#)
 - *“The community at large will need to view schools as “healthy places” for children and society. This could be accomplished by building public health–focused collaborative capable of continuous learning and rapid cycles of implementation, as COVID-19 information evolves at breakneck speed. Otherwise, we risk further compounding the incalculable damage already incurred by COVID-19 among children across our country and the world.”*

Cc: Iowa City Community School District