

ELGS Return-to-School Plan – Updates/Clarifications/FAQ's

The need to be flexible with our plans has been stressed since COVID began. Being able to adjust to our local conditions will help us keep our students and staff in as safe an environment as possible—and keep our students learning on-site. We were able to accomplish this last school year, and it is our goal again for 2021-22.

However, the Delta Variant is making this year a more unique challenge. Since the school year began, we have had positive cases reported from our oldest to our youngest students and several staff, and currently have a total of approximately a dozen of our students/staff quarantined and/or in isolation due to positive cases in our District. Fortunately for the District, at this time, none of the positive cases have been tied to the school setting. Also, as the parents have been very vigilant about keeping their children home when they, and/or the children, have been sick and/or shown possible signs of COVID, the number of close contacts identified from contact at school who have had to be quarantined has been very minimal – only one.

So what does this mean?

- 1) It will be important that parents, students and staff continue to self-check for symptoms and to stay home if ill. We also encourage those experiencing symptoms to get tested and keep other family members home while waiting for results, especially if they are also showing signs of illness. An exception would be if other family members are vaccinated.

At this time, ELGS has not yet received testing materials from the State testing program. If/when this occurs and a testing program is implemented (for special circumstances – outbreaks, special events, etc.), please know, NO student would be tested without parental permission.

- 2) Procedures such as allowing visitors and volunteers to visit during the school day may be temporarily limited at times. If we are seeing higher numbers of our adults testing positive in our District, we are going to practice caution and may limit visits for a time until numbers improve. While we again hope to have our parents join students for lunch, visit classrooms, etc., there may be times when this may not be possible and/or accommodations will be made to have the child/parent move to a separate area, away from other students. Hopefully, these times where parent/volunteer contact needs to be limited doesn't happen often or last for long periods of time. However, we have to be careful to maintain as safe an environment as possible for our students during their school day. At this time, we are not looking to limit attendance at after-school events.
- 3) The definition the District is using to identify a close contact has not changed since last year, but for this school year, there are some exceptions that can apply.
 - a. **Close Contact:** Anyone who was within 6 feet of a positive person for more than 15 minutes total in a day and/or lives with or stayed overnight for at least one

night in a household with the person. For the most part, the District will be looking at the classroom settings and confined spaces (such as bus rides) for identifying close contacts.

b. **Identified close contacts will be quarantined for 10-14 days – the school will work this out with the individual/parent based on the circumstances of the contact.** However, there are exceptions when individuals identified as close contacts do not have to quarantine, as long as they are not showing any signs of illness or displaying any symptoms.

c. **Exceptions to quarantining when identified as a close contact:**

i. In an indoor classroom setting, students are excluded from being identified as a close contact if both the infected student and the exposed student correctly and consistently wore a mask during the time when they were within 6 feet.

While masks are optional, it is for this reason we are encouraging all students to have a mask on at school so they can be worn when working in close proximity with others in a small group setting (ex: science lab, small reading or math groups, etc.). If children are masked and there is a positive case, while the positive case will need to be isolated at home, the others who were in close contact could remain at school and not have to be quarantined. However, this only works if both parties are masked.

This exception only applies to students – not for adults.

Reminder: While masks are optional at school, wearing a mask is required while riding school transportation (bus or school van) per Federal mandate. We expect students to cooperate and follow this mandate.

ii. **Vaccinated individuals who are symptom-free will not need to quarantine after coming into contact with someone who is positive. However, these individuals will be required to wear a mask for 14 days after exposure.**

This exception applies for both students and adults.

Just as masking is optional, vaccination is also a choice. However, for those ages 12 and over, we are encouraging all to consider having your student vaccinated. We want them to be able to stay at school and involved in the activities they enjoy. We truly do value your right as a parent to make this choice.

For those interested, a gentle reminder of the Vaccine Clinic to be held at ELG High School this coming Monday, Sept. 13 from 3:00-7:00 p.m. in the H.S. cafeteria. Please use the back parking lot. This would be the first dose of the Pfizer vaccine with the second dose being administered on Monday, Oct. 4.

It is important to note:

- Individuals who are 12 to 15 must have a parent/guardian present for both doses.

- Individuals who are 16 and 17 are required to have parent/guardian consent to receive the vaccination. In the event that a parent/guardian cannot be present, a consent form must be signed and brought to both doses.
- Students over 18 can participate without parent/guardian permission – though parents may certainly come along!
- Parents and/or other adults and other community members are also welcome.
- The vaccination is free – there is no cost for the vaccination.
- Immigration status is not needed.

Copies of the forms and more information are included in the daily parent announcements and on the school website.

As was stated at the beginning of the letter, our goal to have our students stay on-site as much as possible throughout the school year, as that is where they learn best. Also, students need the social contact and the various extra-curricular activities – just as adults do.

In order to accomplish this goal, we will need your continued patience, cooperation and flexibility. As of now, we haven't had school transmission, and we can only hope that continues. But if things would change, please know. our plan may need to be modified for short periods of time to adjust to various conditions. We hope these are just minor adjustments, such as limiting/modifying visitors and volunteers during the school day, but if we see school transmission, it could involve more plan modifications—targeted at a specific grade level, school or the entire District. This would not be done lightly and without much thought and consideration for all concerned. If it would rise to this level, the District would work with the County Health Department to consider strategies to limit and/or stop the spread.

The more efforts and precautions we take as a school community to limit the spread of COVID (staying home when sick, practicing personal hygiene, choosing to mask when in close contact, etc.) the better our odds of continuing as we now are.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to reach out to the building principals or me.

Sincerely,

Dr. Ann Buechel Haack