

USD 248 District Update:
8/3/2021
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Update to the 2021-2022 “Return to School” Guidelines

At the USD 248 Board of Education meeting on July 8th, 2021, the Board approved the “Return to School Plan” for the 2021-2022 school year. In this document, guidelines were given which reflected the current COVID-19 climate in our county. Most of the mitigation protocols that were in place during the previous school year were lifted, allowing us to revert back to mostly “normal” operations. This guidance document also states however, that the guidelines may change if the Crawford County Health Department amends the current recommendations due to changes in the current local health climate. As mitigation protocols are modified by our local health officials, Girard schools would implement protocols as necessary.

We had hoped to start and continue the 2021-2022 school year under normal operating procedures, to which we had become accustomed prior to COVID-19. Unfortunately, due to the sharp increase in COVID cases in our county, we must take measures to protect our students, staff and community.

This past Friday, the Crawford County Health Department released the Crawford County Mitigation Recommendations and Justifications for K-12 Schools. In this recommendation, Dr. Stebbins, the Crawford County Health Officer, provided very clear direction with justification as to what we need to do to keep our school populations as safe as possible. Crawford County, Kansas is currently experiencing its 4th major spike of COVID-19. The current spike is attributed to the Delta Variant, which has shown to be 50% more transmissible and has shown greater capability to infect those that are younger. Also, 10%-20% of infections are breakthrough infections, occurring in vaccinated individuals.

With this information and at the recommendation of the Crawford County Health Department, USD 248 will amend the current “Return to School Plan” to include many of the COVID health protocols that were in place for much of the last school year. Most notable, students, staff and people entering the district facilities and utilizing school district transportation, will be required to wear protective face coverings as of Wednesday, August 4, 2021, and continuing up to Friday, October 1, 2021. The wearing of face coverings during outside activities will be excluded. USD 248 will remain in constant contact with the Crawford County Health Department, who will reevaluate our current health climate every two weeks. It is possible that we will be able to lift this requirement early, if the current health climate begins to move in a positive direction.

Rest assured, none of us want to require our students to wear face coverings, but we do want our students to be in school for face-to-face instruction in as safe of an environment as possible. Face coverings did allow this to happen last year and did allow us to minimize the number of students who needed to be quarantined away from school.

Our Board of Education members, administrators, and staff do not have medical backgrounds as a whole. Despite this fact, we are still responsible for the safety and wellbeing of the large gathering of people in our buildings each day. That is a daunting responsibility that none of us takes lightly. There are but a few local experts on COVID and its activity in our county, and our best strategy is to consistently rely on their expertise for information and guidance.

The advice of our current County Health Officer has been the one constant for us in making decisions regarding COVID-19 since its inception. We recognize that there are differing opinions, but our policy has been and will continue to be to follow the recommendations of our local Health Department and Health Officer. To do otherwise and assume we know better would be negligent. We are asking for your patience and understanding as we strive to make the best decisions possible regarding the safety and well-being of our students, staff and community.