



Lemont High School

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Students, Parents/Guardians and Faculty and Staff:

Momentum has been building for months for the return to in-person learning this fall, which makes our realization over the last few days so painful to communicate. **Newly issued Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH) guidance places restrictions on school districts that we cannot reasonably meet, and we have been advised that additional IDPH metrics for safely reopening schools are forthcoming. For these reasons, Lemont High School District 210 and Lemont-Bromberek School District 113A are forced to begin the 2020-21 school year with full-time remote learning.**

Our teachers **want** to be back in the classroom in front of their students. In each district, they partnered with administrators to develop our reopening plans. Our planning teams have worked at all hours for months, managing ever-changing guidance to ensure not only that faculty and staff are prepared for this new environment, but also that our buildings are safe. The District 210 Board of Education and District 113A Board of Education each have fully supported our districts' respective efforts to return to in-person learning.

Metrics for Reopening

Since the first few weeks of the closure of schools, school district superintendents from all corners of the state have been begging for guidance from state officials on what metrics could be used to determine whether it is safe to reopen for in-person learning.

In the absence of these metrics, we began developing our own. As we communicated last week, we have been monitoring the local seven-day average test positivity rate for the 60439 zip code. This rate is a key factor in determining how the Lemont community is doing in dealing with COVID-19.

We are aware that the IDPH is now in the process of preparing metrics for safely reopening schools, which may include incidence rate (number of positive tests per 100 thousand people), the number of admissions to hospitals of individuals with symptoms consistent with COVID-19, and the length of time for diagnostic tests to return with results.

We cannot begin in-person learning without knowing the IDPH metrics for safely reopening schools.

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Revised IDPH Guidance

On Wednesday, August 12, the IDPH issued several pages of new guidance for school districts. Many items among this guidance make it virtually impossible for our districts to hold in-person learning. Some examples include:

- The definition of 'close contact' was redefined to be anyone (with or without a face covering) who was within six feet of a confirmed case of COVID-19 (with or without a face covering) for at least 15 minutes *throughout the course of a day*.
 - In the previous definition, the 15 minutes was any one instance on any single day. Schools must account for this time over a 24-hour period - including within classrooms, on the bus, during passing periods, in common areas, outside of school, or during athletic participation. This new definition creates a significant challenge to be able to identify students and staff who have been in "close contact."
- If a student is sent home sick with suspected COVID-19 symptoms, all of their siblings/household members must be sent home as well. If one of the household members is being evaluated for COVID-19, *the rest of the household must be quarantined until an alternative diagnosis is made or a negative result is received*. This is in addition to the previous recommendation that all students and staff with COVID-like symptoms be diagnostically tested.
 - These requirements will make it very difficult to staff a school, as teachers whose children or household members are sent home from school would be out of the classroom for two full weeks. Our districts do not have the number of substitute teachers on call to deal with these types of absences, and classroom attendance would be affected across both our districts because many families have students enrolled in both District 210 and District 113A. Additionally, the amount of testing necessary given the return of students and staff may be beyond the current capacity of local health care providers.
- Personnel involved with the evaluation of students or staff who are reporting COVID-like symptoms, or who are responsible for cleaning areas used by an individual known or suspected to have COVID-19, are required to use personal protective equipment *including a fit-tested N95 respirator*. Additionally, any space occupied by a person with any COVID-like symptom should close for a recommended 24 hours before cleaning. This means that on a daily basis, we could have to close nurses' offices or relocate classrooms based on one student presenting only one symptom.
 - This requirement of our school nurses and custodial staff - specifically concerning the fit-tested N95 respirator and closing spaces - will require procedures that are at or above guidelines in many other industries, including medical settings. Schools are not equipped to implement protocols in this manner and it is not feasible to close nurses' offices or spaces on a daily basis.

We are not making a judgement on the efficacy of these requirements, and trust that public health officials are providing guidance they feel is necessary. However, we cannot reasonably meet these requirements at this time, so beginning in-person learning of any kind is not in the best interests of our students, faculty and staff.

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What's next?

Both District 210 and District 113A will begin **full-time remote learning on Monday, August 24**. Except for extenuating circumstances, teachers will provide instruction from their classrooms.

District 113A's previously scheduled half day on Friday, August 21 will be rescheduled as a day for material pick up. Lemont High School's "New Student Day" on August 21, will be held remotely; more information will be sent to parents/guardians later this week.

In the coming days, we will communicate with our respective families on how they can pick up the appropriate items from school, including school supplies, textbooks and Chromebooks, among other items.

Every school district has its own set of circumstances to consider when making decisions. We are committed to making decisions that are in the best interests of students, faculty and staff, but based on **our** circumstances... not just to fall in line with actions taken by other school districts.

The next logical question is, "When will in-person learning be able to occur?" Honestly, we do not know. We of course will continue to monitor all guidance provided by local, state and federal health agencies. However, until we know clearly what the metrics are for safely reopening schools, and as long as the IDPH requirements as currently provided are in place without additional clarification, support or guidance, our students will participate in full-time remote learning.

To reiterate, we want our students to be able to return to the classroom. We have spent countless hours with the goal of returning to in-person learning, and we are ready. Our faculty and staff are ready. Our buildings are ready. Each Board of Education is ready. And most importantly - and most disappointingly - an overwhelming majority of our students and their families are ready. Unfortunately, it doesn't matter how ready all of us are if we do not have timely, consistent and clear guidance from the agencies we rely upon to support us.

District 210 and District 113A are committed to providing the best education we can for our students under these circumstances. Even though we have been preparing for the return of students to our buildings, we are confident the remote educational experience for our students compared to last spring is vastly improved. We have invested time and resources in improving our remote learning capabilities in case we needed to make the decision to move students to full-time remote learning.

We just didn't expect it would be now.

Thank you for your support of public education in the Lemont community.

Dr. Mary Ticknor

Superintendent

Lemont High School District 210

Dr. Anthony McConnell

Superintendent

Lemont-Bromberek School District 113A

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