



OAK PARK and RIVER FOREST HIGH SCHOOL

Dear OPRF High School Staff and Families,

With the school year well underway now, I want to provide you with an update on our latest COVID-19 statistics as well as a response to questions we've recently received regarding potential outbreaks at OPRF, quarantining, and testing.

First off, I'm pleased to report that our vaccination rate is at 79% of students and 84% of employees, which exceeds the original overall target of 70% for approaching herd immunity. However, the Delta variant has changed the equation. According to our most recent guidance, a fully vaccinated rate of closer to 90% or higher is what we need to aim for now.

That's a realistic target. Vaccination is safe and effective, and it remains the number one way to prevent the spread of COVID. I urge everyone eligible to get fully vaccinated as soon as possible. [Click here](#) for information on where to do so.

Additional good news is that three weeks into the school year, our weekly number of positive cases of COVID has remained low--in the single digits. You can check the [dashboard on our website](#) to see weekly updates on the number of new COVID cases as well as persons in quarantine. One thing you won't find on the dashboard this year are any thresholds for moving toward hybrid or fully remote learning, because per the state, these are not options this school year. In-person classes for all is the priority, and we have [a variety of mitigations in place](#) to ensure that we can follow that directive while keeping everyone in our building as safe and healthy as possible.

Our case numbers have included two outbreaks since classes began. *Outbreak* is a very specific term for which the criteria has changed, according to the Illinois Department of Public Health. Currently, an outbreak is defined as two epidemiologically linked cases where transmission is believed to have occurred at school between members of different households; last year the criteria for an outbreak was five such cases.

The first outbreak involved three employees, while the second involved five students. We are required to report all positive cases to the health department, which specifically investigates any outbreaks to determine the extent of the spread. We have been in very close contact with the health department, and it is not advising that we take any additional mitigation measures at this time. Our students are doing a fantastic job

of complying with masking requirements, which goes a long way toward reducing COVID cases and outbreaks. Thank you.

In all cases where a student or employee informs us they have tested positive, we conduct contact tracing within the building to determine whether there are any close contacts who need to quarantine. (For the definitions of *close contact*, please see our [COVID FAQ](#).) Currently we do have over 100 students in quarantine, which has been a significant strain on our resources. To help us manage this very detailed and time-consuming process, we are finalizing the hiring of additional team members who will be dedicated to testing and contact tracing. This will help us to be more precise in our decision-making, and ensure that only those individuals who we are certain are close contacts need to quarantine.

Unfortunately, we also know that for those students who must be quarantined, the instruction we can provide is not parallel to the in-person experiences in our current model. We know that this presents challenges for all of our students, and also that the research is very clear: Lost instruction can have a disparate effect on our most vulnerable students. We are having daily conversations about how we can scale up and expand our services, and we are rolling these ideas out as quickly as resources allow.

Finally, I want to acknowledge the tremendous efforts of our nursing staff: Head Nurse Julee Terretta, Nurse Natalie Yorty, Nurse Katie Smulkstys, and Health Services Office Manager Donna Digioia. They have been working long and hard to conduct rapid testing, track all positive cases and quarantines, field an enormous volume of email and phone calls, ensure that we are following all protocols required by the Oak Park Department of Public Health, *and* process the many other illnesses that come through their office every day. I'm sorry to say that they are not always being treated kindly. Please show them patience and grace. They are on the frontlines of this pandemic, and they deserve much appreciation.

To keep you informed about the current status around COVID-19 at OPRF, next week I will begin providing weekly updates such as this in the Friday HuskiEmail, so please be sure to look for those.

In closing, I want to thank all of you for everything you are doing to keep our school community healthy and safe.

Sincerely,

Greg Johnson, Ph.D.
Superintendent