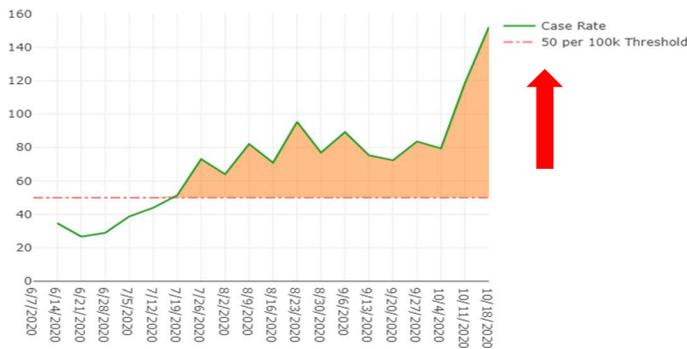




October 26, 2020

Dear Center Cass Parents and Guardians –

DuPage County COVID-19 cases continue to rise. Below are two charts from IDPH showing the dramatic rise in COVID-19 new cases and positivity rates. It is very concerning. Graphs: <http://dph.illinois.gov/countyschool?county=DuPage>



As a result of the increases, the DCHD will remain in the Substantial Community Transmission category via the school guidance document <https://www.dupagehealth.org/DocumentCenter/View/3541/COVID-19-Return-to-School-Framework-8-28> is designed to alert schools of changes in county numbers and help with school decision making. Although DuPage County COVID-19 cases have increased, the county has not yet met IDPH's indicators for the State to move DuPage County into the Warning Level. Region 8 (Kane and DuPage) new case numbers have collectively increased enough to warrant new restrictions, including limits on dining and gatherings. Schools are exempt from new restrictions and follow School IDPH guidelines <http://dph.illinois.gov/countyschool?county=DuPage>.

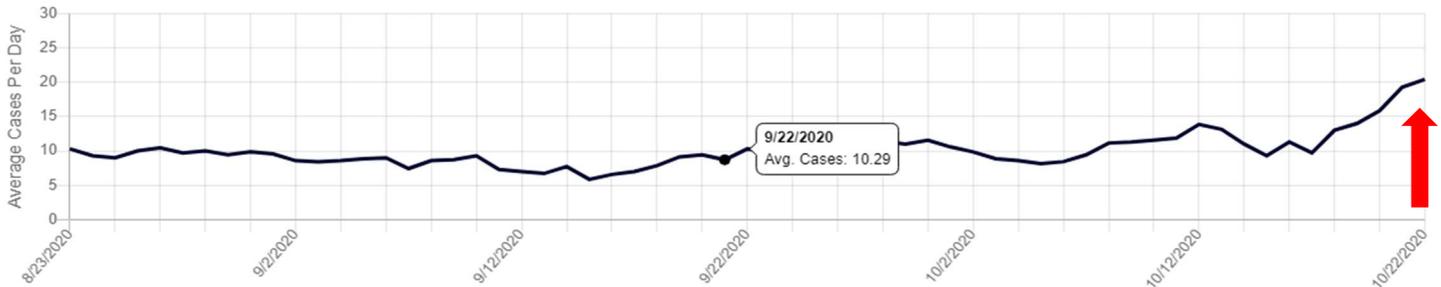
I wanted to take a moment to thank the DCHD COVID-19 Response Team for their efforts. The DCHD COVID-19 Response Team has always been available when the School Nurses or I have needed them. In addition, I want to thank the DCHD Executive Director, Karen Ayala, and her team, for meeting with School Superintendents twice a week to discuss trend data. In an effort to explain the school decision making process, Executive Director Ayala posted the following on their website late last week, <https://www.dupagehealth.org/595/Schools-and-Daycares>.

DCHD supports the decision-making authority and discretion of Superintendents in DuPage County to determine the appropriate learning plans, whether remote or in-person, and implementation for their school district. DCHD has worked collaboratively with Superintendents to equip them with the public health guidance and data necessary to aid and inform their decision-making process during any transmission level. DCHD is not able to and does not have the authority to endorse the safety of any specific decision made by Superintendents, within or outside of the recommendations provided in our framework. As stated in our framework, we encourage DuPage Superintendents to consider individual school-level factors such as case and outbreak activity, specific disease trends and distribution, absenteeism among students and staff within a school, ability of the school to implement key mitigation strategies, and alternate remote learning site options and safety protocols when making the decision for their school community.

Center Cass 66 will continue to work with DCHD and consider IDPH, DCHD, local (Darien/Woodridge/Downers), and school metrics in making the decision on when to move a cohort, school, or district into a full remote model.



When looking at our three zip codes, you see the same trend in Darien, Woodridge, and Downers Grove regarding increased cases. http://covid-dashboard.fsm.northwestern.edu/?fbclid=IwAR3KXK0A0YOPfPN1OjIXe0gobWxbW9hLESBppMPX_1pTQ_uFGFhofjzE16s



School metrics include cases at school, number of cases in a cohort, timing of cases, location of contraction, absenteeism, ability to staff, and ability to meet ever changing IDPH guidelines. With numbers increasing throughout the state, especially in the 5-14 age population, the Governor could also mandate schools to move fully remote at any time.

When we look at our own data and day-to-day situations, we are starting to experience:

- the loss of our outdoor learning spaces to inclement weather (creating increased risk when you move the activities once outside, to the inside, such as PE, mask breaks, eating snacks, classroom projects, band, etc)
- rise in absenteeism for employees and students (to meet IDPH guidelines and keep the school safe);
- decrease in following the 3 W's (due to increasing COVID fatigue on everyone's part);
- traveling for mental health or family time (creating quarantines and staffing difficulties);
- space constraints for winter gear (making social distancing difficult as boots and coats decrease space); and
- sniffles and coughs from weather changes (driving up absenteeism and doctor's visits).

We continue to brainstorm and work through each situation as it surfaces, but at some point, with the shortages of testing, rise in hospitalizations, increase in cases where we live/work/learn, it will signal a need for us to take an Adaptive Pause for the physical and mental health of all students and staff. The 5-14 demographic of DuPage (our student ages) have rising positivity rates and will soon surpass the positivity rate of the demographic consisting of their older peers.

We will do our best to keep our dual platform of in person learning and remote learning alive in our schools as long as it is safe, and we will also start planning for an Adaptive Pause in our in-person learning model, so we are prepared. If a change in our learning model is needed for the physical and mental health of our D66 students and employees, we will provide our community with as much forewarning as possible (hopefully at least a few weeks).

We opened our school because the data above showed that it was safe, we had the personnel to effectively open, we had the learning space to appropriately distance, and we were able to meet IDPH guidelines, when other schools were not able to. As we approach winter and flu season, if the data continues to show increase risk to safety, absences increase making staffing a challenge, learning space is lost, and/or IDPH guidelines increase beyond our abilities, we will take a break from in-person and move full remote, until it is safe to resume in-person learning.

I will provide another update next Monday with a report on where we stand.

Sincerely –

Dr. Wise
Superintendent of Schools