

## Press Clippings 10-20-20

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### School districts start to respond

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Naperville Central High School and other Naperville Unit District 203 school will now keep most learning remote until at least Nov. 4



Students at York High School in Elmhurst will switch to remote learning for two weeks starting Wednesday as a result of rising COVID-19 test positivity rates in DuPage County.



Courtesy of Wheaton Warrenville Unit District 200 Teacher Katherine Kondak welcomed students back to Wiesbrook Elementary School in Wheaton last month.

At least two major school districts are reverting to or extending fully remote learning in response to rising COVID-19 case rates in DuPage County, while several others say they'll keep schools open but closely watch the numbers.

Elmhurst Unit District 205 will switch to online-only instruction starting Wednesday for two weeks. The setback comes two weeks after it became one of the first school systems in the county to bring all students back to classrooms for hybrid learning.

Naperville Unit District 203 planned to roll out the second phase of its reopening plan this week. Instead, Superintendent Dan Bridges announced Monday most students in the district will continue e-learning until Nov. 4. Only K-12 specialized programs will continue with in-person learning.

While the county health department is now recommending schools operate with 100% remote learning, it's ultimately up to individual districts to decide whether to do so.

The county recently registered a weekly infection rate of 119 new cases per 100,000 people. That metric exceeds a state-set threshold moving DuPage from a “moderate” to “substantial” level of community transmission.

A surge in cases across the region leaves a cloud of uncertainty over school reopenings just as waves of students return to classrooms at least for part of the week.

Meanwhile, **Elgin Area School District U-46 Superintendent Tony Sanders** said district officials plan to bring back some students next week.

Limited in-person instruction for small groups of special-needs students began two weeks ago. Prekindergarten through second-graders are expected to start hybrid classes for two days a week starting Monday.

“I’m not going to stop our planning to reopen at this point,” Sanders said. “We are going to monitor the data every single day. Things could change for the worse. Either way, we are making our plans for kids to return.”

Transmission rates within the district, whose boundaries stretch across Cook, DuPage and Kane counties, were at moderate-to-higher moderate or minimal levels when U-46 decided to bring back students. Now, there is a “substantial spread” of COVID-19 cases in most U-46 communities — Bartlett, Carol Stream, the east side of Elgin, Hanover Park, South Elgin, Streamwood, Wayne and West Chicago. Elgin’s west side and Hoffman Estates are the only areas with moderate spread, Sanders said.

The east side of Elgin, Streamwood, Wayne and West Chicago also have substantial cases among youths, he said.

For now, Sanders said, the plan is to start hybrid learning for third- through sixth-graders in late November or early December, and bring in smaller groups of middle and high school students starting in November.

“What worries me is we have to start following the guidance that our health departments are giving us,” he said. “If you want your kids in school, then we all have to agree to this new social contract of wearing a mask, keeping our distance and washing our hands.”

The DuPage health department has seen reports of COVID-19 cases in dozens of students and school employees, but the majority are not linked to outbreaks inside schools, officials said Monday.

Still, officials warned the risk of school-related outbreaks increases as virus infections spread in the wider community.

For now, some area superintendents say they won’t pivot to distance learning and remain confident in their mitigation measures inside schools.

Glenbard High School District 87 has set clear thresholds for scaling back in-person learning.

In one scenario, the district would move classes online if all three of the following criteria are met: Any single county health department metric indicates substantial transmission for three weeks, one or more schools have had to cease daily operations because of building-level targets, and the health department is concerned “spread is happening in the local school community.”

On Monday, Glenbard students moved to a hybrid schedule.

“I’m very confident on our measures and the schedule that we’ve put together,” Superintendent David Larson said. “We’ve slowed the day down. We only have four periods, 70 minutes each. We’re not serving lunch. We have a host of staff to watch the corridors and traffic patterns to ensure students are distancing themselves.”

Wheaton Warrenville Unit District 200 has no immediate plans to halt in-person learning, but officials called the county-level data concerning.

“It means that the community needs to double down on mitigation strategies, but we’re going to monitor that here over the next week or so,” Superintendent Jeff Schuler said.

In a letter to families, Schuler said the health department has agreed it’s appropriate to monitor data because “school mitigation strategies have been effective.”

A district dashboard shows two students and one staff member had positive tests across early childhood and elementary schools for the week ending Oct. 11. A total of 13 students and three employees at those grade levels have tested positive since the school year began Sept. 1.

Schuler told the school board last week the positive cases were linked to transmission outside of school buildings.

Elmhurst District 205 Superintendent David Moyer announced the “adaptive pause” to in-person learning in a note to families, citing rising case rates and a 46.7% increase in youth cases.

“This means that the presence of COVID-19 is on a large scale and is widely spreading throughout our community at a rapid pace that jeopardizes the health and safety of our families,” Moyer said.

Coronavirus concerns are spreading to at least a couple of other suburban school districts. Round Lake Area Unit District 116 will not be returning to in-person learning anytime soon, citing the increase of positive cases in the Round Lake area.

And Prairie Ridge High School in Crystal Lake will close today, returning to all-remote learning the rest of the week, due to a number of confirmed COVID-19 cases. The McHenry County Department of Health notified the high school on Monday it was under evaluation because of COVID-19 cases, the school’s website said. The exact number of cases wasn’t provided.