

Press Clippings 08/06/21

--Elgin Courier-News---08/06/2021

Sanders backs CDC guidelines

by Mike Danahey

Elgin School District U-46 Superintendent Tony Sanders released a message Tuesday reminding all that when classes start Aug 16 mask-wearing will be required and other pandemic-related protocols will be in place.

Sanders' words came before Illinois Gov. J.B. Pritzker Wednesday afternoon announced that students, staff and guests inside schools will be required to wear masks as will students, coaches and spectators at extracurricular activities such as sports, effective immediately.

In his memo Sanders said that at Monday's board of education meeting he will be recommending the district fully comply with the most recent guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the Illinois Department of Public Health, the Illinois State Board of Education and the Cook, DuPage and Kane County Health Departments.

He notes that all the agencies recommend vaccinations for anyone who is eligible along with universal indoor masking for all teachers, students and visitors to schools, regardless of vaccination status.

At last month's board of education meeting, Sanders said that Pre-K through 6th grade students would be required to wear masks, while middle and high school students who are unvaccinated would be strongly encouraged to wear them.

Since then, the CDC has changed its recommendations given the spread of the delta variant of COVID-19, a sharp rise in cases and more being learned about the new strain.

Following the recommendations, U-46 protocols also will include social distancing of 3 to 6 feet to the extent possible; regular testing among unvaccinated students, with permission from parents only; regular hand washing and respiratory etiquette; and monitoring data, including vaccination rates among staff and students, community transmission rates, and reported COVID-19 cases in schools.

"Our ability to return to a more normal experience for students hinges on our ability to follow this guidance," Sanders said in his message. "Further, following this guidance will assist us in

avoiding disruption in the learning of students by helping to prevent quarantine periods for students.”

Sanders also recommends parents/guardians have students 12 and over vaccinated and that they provide proof of vaccination to the district. He also would like parents/guardians to opt-in and complete a SHIELD testing form they should be receiving in the next couple of weeks.

“SHIELD is a saliva-based COVID-19 test that provides accurate results within 24 hours. Students who participate in our regular testing and are asymptomatic do not need to quarantine if they are in close contact with someone who has been diagnosed with COVID,” Sanders said.

“All health authorities are telling us that the universal use of masks — even among the vaccinated — is necessary to protect one another from the spread of COVID-19. To go against such strong recommendations — especially as we welcome back all 37,000 students and 2,700 teachers to classrooms — would be negligent on my part,” Sanders said.

The board meeting is at 7 p.m. Monday at the central office, 355 E. Chicago St., Elgin. It can be viewed live via Zoom or YouTube Live.

Anyone wanting to publicly comment should follow the instructions found online with the board’s agenda, or email Board@u-46.org before Monday with “Public Comment” in the subject line.

At last month’s board of education meeting, many people spoke about the mask issue, with most of the speakers against having students wearing masks.

Two speakers likened requiring children to wear masks to child abuse. Another called COVID-19 vaccinations an evil experiment.

Only two speakers that night talked in favor of the district’s policies, including data analyst and engineer Lincoln Marunde.

“The best approach is created by layers of prevention...masks are a simple, effective, essential layer and should not be optional,” Marunde said.

Of the anti-maskers who spoke before him, Marunde said, “I don’t know what data these people are citing, but none of it is true. All these numbers are nonsense to me... It’s a scary time. It’s a weird time. We need to get through it. And we aren’t getting through it because a lot of people aren’t doing what they’re supposed to be doing.”

--Kane County Connects---08/06/2021

Illinois Requires Masks for Public Schools, Long-Term Care Facilities

As COVID-19 infection rates across the state continue to increase and with a number of school districts not yet adopting CDC guidance on masking, Gov. JB Pritzker and IDPH Director Dr. Ngozi Ezike today (Wednesday, Aug. 4, 2021) announced masks will be required for students, teachers, and staff at pre-kindergarten-to-12th-grade schools and day cares across the state.

The new requirement formalizes CDC guidance released in July on universal masking for both unvaccinated and vaccinated people in schools to ensure a safe return to classrooms.

Pritzker also announced his intent to require all state employees working in congregate facilities to receive the COVID-19 vaccine by Oct. 4.

The state is informing the unions representing these employees of its intention to move forward with this requirement, which covers employees at the Departments of Human Services, Veterans' Affairs, Corrections and Juvenile Justice working in congregate facilities.

The state is also requiring universal masking in private long-term care facilities and strongly encourages owners of private facilities to join the state in adopting vaccination requirements.

In a news release, state officials said the new measures are part of the state's ongoing effort to combat a new surge as the Delta variant rapidly spreads among the unvaccinated.

Since COVID-19 metrics reached their lowest points earlier this summer, cases have soared by a factor of nearly 10, hospitalizations and ICU rates have more than doubled in a month, and the number of COVID patients requiring a ventilator has multiplied nearly 2.5 times over since July 16.

In June, 96% of people hospitalized in Illinois with COVID-19 were unvaccinated or only partially vaccinated, with the majority of those hospitalizations occurring in residents under 60 years old.

"Given our current trajectory in hospitalizations and ICU usage, we have a limited amount of time right now to stave off the highest peaks of this surge going into the fall," Pritzker said. "To combat the Delta variant, Illinois is taking three key steps to protect our state's 1.8 million unvaccinated children under 12 and their families, residents and staff of long-term care facilities, and those highly vulnerable people who rely upon state employees for their daily care.

"I also encourage every Illinoisan who is eligible to get vaccinated as soon as possible, as millions of their neighbors already have. This vaccine is safe, effective, and essentially eliminates the risk of hospitalization and death even from the Delta variant. In short, it's the best tool we have."

IDPH Director Dr. Ngozi Ezike said vaccination is the best way to prevent further spread.

“Data show that the vaccines are preventing severe illness, hospitalization, and death, and are effective against the Delta variant,” she said. “We have the tools to turn the tide of another wave, but we need people to use them.”

In preparation for the start of the upcoming school year and in response to the highly contagious Delta variant, all students, teachers, and staff at pre-kindergarten through 12th grade schools and day cares will be required to wear masks regardless of vaccination status, effective immediately.

This guidance is in line with recommendations from the CDC.

The state is also requiring universal masking in long-term care facilities regardless of vaccination status.

Illinois is home to 1.8 million children under the age of 12 who are not yet eligible to receive the COVID-19 vaccine.

With the Delta variant infecting the younger population at a greater rate and with people under 29 years old now accounting for 12% of COVID hospitalizations in June, requiring the use of masks is the most effective tool to allow students to return to their classrooms safely while protecting them from the virus.

Mask wearing will also help prevent unvaccinated students from transmitting the virus to more vulnerable members of their broader communities.

The mask requirement is inclusive of youth sports and activities, with masks now required for all indoor extracurriculars and sports. In line with CDC guidance, masks are not required for activities outdoors where transmission risks and rates are lower.

The administration is providing free testing to all pre-K-12 schools in Illinois outside of Chicago, which received a separate federal funding allocation for testing.

IDPH also provided additional guidance for students and staff who are exposed to someone who tests positive for COVID-19.

Close contacts of a positive case can remain in school if they receive testing on days one, three, five, and seven post exposure and if they wore masks at the time of exposure.

“The CDC strengthened its guidance last week for universal indoor masking in schools, and Illinois will continue to follow the science, data, and public health experts to keep students in school and keep communities safe,” said State Superintendent of Education Dr. Carmen I. Ayala. “We know that consistent and correct mask use is the simplest, most effective way to keep students safely in school, where they can learn and grow to their fullest potential.”

A number of school districts across the state have already adopted CDC guidance and implemented a mask requirement to help prevent the spread of COVID-19 among students, teachers, and staff and the communities they live in.

Those districts include the state's two largest school districts, Chicago and Elgin U-46, as well as Edwardsville Community School District 7, Peoria Public School District 150, Champaign Unit 4 School District, Springfield School District 186, and Naperville School District 203.

To help schools across the state protect the health and safety of students and staff, the Illinois Emergency Management Agency (IEMA) has distributed 2.5 million free face masks to public schools since the beginning of the pandemic.

The free masks grant every child the ability to access the learning opportunities provided by their school in person, regardless of their ability to purchase a face covering or make one at home.

The state will continue to supply masks to school districts as they request assistance.

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Elgin National Night Out adds COVID-19 information, vaccinations to community safety efforts

by Mike Danahey

Along with snacks, strolling musicians, a bouncy house and hot dogs, one of Elgin's seven National Night Out block parties Tuesday evening offered pandemic-related information and an opportunity for adults to get vaccinated for COVID-19.

"We're here targeting adult walk-ins with the one-dose Johnson & Johnson shot. We're also letting people know that they can come to us to seek financial help with bills, rent and mortgages they might need because of the pandemic as well as to schedule vaccinations," Martha Martinez said.

Martinez manages Elgin Area Pandemic Assistance, a program run through the Gail Borden Public Library funded with a grant of \$414,000 from the Illinois Department of Public Health and the Illinois Public Health Association.

Martinez and others from the program set up tables at the block party in front of Holy Trinity Lutheran Church. Three staffers from the Lake in the Hills Walgreens were available inside the church to administer the jabs.

Bob Langlois, Holy Trinity council president, said the congregation invited the assistance program to the gathering around the intersection of Division and Chapel street as part of its neighborhood outreach.

Langlois is past chairman of the Elgin Cooperative Ministry, which includes among its members Holy Trinity, Congregation Kneseth Israel and Kingdom Advancement Center. The three close-by flocks, along with the Elgin Police Department, hosted the Tuesday block party. No parties were held last year in Elgin because of the pandemic.

According to the National Night Out website, such gatherings grew from an effort in suburban Philadelphia back in 1970 to promote camaraderie between police and neighbors. The first nationwide events happened in 1984 and an estimated 16,000 communities are holding Night Out events sometime this year.

“We hosted a party with the other two congregations three years ago, drew about 200 people and used #unityondivision to promote it,” Holy Trinity Deaconess Andrea Delaney said. “It’s nice to be able to do this again, to meet each other and have fun.”

To that point, Elgin Citizens Police Academy Alumni Association member Irene Oswald walked about with a tray Tuesday evening offering free kosher hot dogs made available from Congregation Kneseth Israel.

“I’ve taken part in Night Out before, and I’m glad it’s back. I like the community spirit here and people coming together with the police department,” Oswald said.

The Girl Scouts of Northern Illinois, **Elgin School District U-46** and Housing Continuum Inc./Community Contacts were among the other participants in Tuesday’s get-together. So was Elgin Board of Health Chairwoman Dr. Dorothea Poulos.

Poulos attended the Night Out at the behest of the pandemic assistance program to co-host a Facebook Live session with the library’s Hispanic services associate Flor Chavez. It was the fourth such social media presentation she did with the group and the first out in the community, Poulos said.

Poulos said that in discussions online and with the patients she sees as a family physician, people are concerned with how to approach the coronavirus now as the delta variant spreads.

She recommends following the CDC’s suggested guidelines for masking, social distancing and getting vaccinated. Though she acknowledges that can be a challenge.

“You’re never going to be able to convince some people. They’ve fallen prey to what they’ve seen on social media and to pseudoscience,” Poulos said.

Poulos reminded that research indicates the delta strain is much more contagious than the alpha variant. People who have been vaccinated may become infected and carry high viral loads with the delta variant, but rarely have to be hospitalized, she said.

As for masks, “Personally, I always have mine handy, but it’s off in certain situations, like here at the block party, where it’s outdoors. But if it’s somewhere crowded or indoors like grocery shopping at Jewel, I will put on a mask. While I’m vaccinated, aside from being a precaution for me, I think wearing a mask in such places is a matter of politeness to others,” Poulos said.

For more information on local vaccination efforts and pandemic relief funding, see the Elgin Area Pandemic Assistance website, elgincovidhelp.com, email elginareaPAT@gmail.com or phone 224-765-7370.