

Press Clippings for 8/10/2022

Chicago Tribune/The Courier-News

‘A more normal school year’: No mandatory masks or COVID-19 testing for U-46 students heading back to classrooms next week, officials say

--- 8/9/2022

By Mike Danahey



District U-46 students won't be required to wear COVID-19 masks in school as long as they don't show symptoms or test positive for the virus, officials said. (Michael Loccisano/Getty Images)

School District U-46 will start the new school year Aug. 16 with only a few COVID-19 measures still in place and progress being made on filling staff openings.

“We are looking forward to, hopefully, what will feel like a more normal school year than years past,” U-46 Superintendent Tony Sanders said at Monday night’s School Board meeting.

The district will allow parents to decide if their children should be vaccinated and won’t be doing SHIELD testing to determine if students or staff have COVID-19, Health Services Supervisor Jeff Judge said.

However, the small number of district staff who chose not to be vaccinated but agreed to weekly testing will continue to do so through Aug. 20 per an executive order issued by Gov. J.B. Pritzker, Judge said.

Home test kits are available for free from the federal government and insurance companies, and there remain places people can go for free testing, he said.

Contact tracing will be required for students and staff who are symptomatic and have tested positive.

Students and staff who have COVID symptoms and either do not get tested or test positive must isolate for five days after the diagnosis. They can return to school on the sixth day provided they are fever-free for at least 24 hours without the aid of fever-reducing medication, do not vomit or have diarrhea for at least 24 hours, and agree to wear a well-fitted mask through day 10 of the diagnosis.

Schools will provide masks to students and staff that don't have them, Judge said.

Those who don't want to wear masks can wait until day 11 to return, he said. Anyone who shows signs of having COVID-19 but tests negative can come to school, he said.

The district will continue to monitor for signs of the virus in schools and in the general population of Cook, DuPage and Kane counties, where U-46 schools are located. COVID-19 cleaning will continue on a daily basis.

School Board President Sue Kerr noted the measures could change before school starts, depending on recommendations expected later this week from the Centers for Disease Control.

As for staffing, **Assistant Superintendent for Human Resources Mark Moore** said the district still has openings to fill.

"In the teaching ranks, we still have about 149 FTEs (full-time-equivalent jobs) still posted," Moore said. "However, we don't typically take the postings down until we are sure the candidates we have recommended have signed on and are for sure coming to work. So the number is definitely smaller than that."

Many of the teacher openings are bilingual positions, he said.

The district also needs to fill about 85 full-time-equivalent paraprofessional positions, 22 in the secretarial division and 12 janitorial jobs.

"With a week to go ... we are making good progress," Moore said.

Ann Williams, deputy superintendent for operations, said U-46 has 262 bus routes with 251 drivers "ready to drive tomorrow." There are also 32 driver candidates in the pool and nearly a dozen transportation staff members licensed to drive a school bus, she said.

"Mechanics are really where the need is. If anyone has friends who are mechanics, send them our way," Williams said.

The 74

Quarantines Cost Students 15 Days in 2021; New CDC Guidance Could Be Gamechanger

Experts say CDC's forthcoming recommendations could curb student absenteeism, but also create 'needless frustration and confusion' as school starts

--- 8/8/2022

By Linda Jacobson



Los Angeles Unified students sample new menu items for the upcoming school year. The district is among those adjusting COVID protocols for this fall, while some districts across the country have dropped them completely. (Gary Coronado/Getty Images)

Quarantine rules last school year may have prevented COVID from spreading, but they also contributed to high absenteeism, with some students sent home multiple times because they were a “close contact” of someone who tested positive.

Students missed an average of 15 days between September and January alone due to quarantines, according to [one poll](#). But now, after more than two years of disrupted learning, new guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention could keep more students in the classroom.

The agency is expected to update its recommendations to say that those who are unvaccinated can continue to attend school if they wear a mask and test negative five days later, according to multiple news outlets, including [CNN](#) and [CBS News](#). [Current guidance](#) recommends that those not up-to-date on vaccinations stay home for five days after coming in contact with someone who tested positive.

“Since the beginning of the pandemic, [messaging] has mostly focused on encouraging students to stay home as a strategy for keeping healthy,” said Hedy Chang, executive director of Attendance Works, a research and advocacy organization. “We think a more balanced

approach would be to emphasize that showing up to school matters for health, well-being and learning.”

The guidance would reflect the direction that many states and districts were already moving toward, noted John Bailey, a strategic adviser at the Walton Family Foundation who has monitored COVID policy since the beginning of the pandemic. In July, for example, Virginia Gov. Glenn Youngkin said students exposed to the disease don’t need to quarantine if they lack symptoms. Many districts aren’t requiring masks this fall, and Los Angeles Unified recently backed off last year’s strict protocols involving daily health declarations and weekly testing. By next week, over half of the nation’s students will be back in school, according to Burbio, a data company.

“The CDC should have released updated guidance in June or July to give schools time to adjust their plans and preparations,” Bailey said. “Releasing it this late creates needless frustration and confusion, which just further erodes confidence in both the CDC and administration.”

Critics have pointed to multiple lapses at the agency since the beginning of the pandemic, such as allowing teachers unions to heavily influence guidance for schools and fumbling updates to mask recommendations for early-childhood programs.

Some experts think it would have been difficult to start the new school year enforcing the same protocols school districts implemented before — like masking and frequent testing. That’s despite a highly contagious BA.5 variant, over 40% of the country being in the high transmission range, and low vaccination rates among young children and 5- to 11-year-olds.

“The problem is that these comprehensive efforts are meeting two powerful forces — exhaustion and apathy from the American people, and the clash of politics and public health in ways I’ve never seen in my lifetime,” said John Bridgeland, founder and CEO of COVID Collaborative, a team of experts that has provided recommendations throughout the pandemic.

Quarantine policies also contributed to a lack of academic progress last year even at a time when students were back in school, researchers with NWEA, a nonprofit assessment organization, said when they released their latest results in July.

Parents complained about inconsistent rules. Some also violated them. In California’s Marin County, last year, parents knowingly sent a child who had tested positive to school. And three Arizona men with zip ties threatened a citizen’s arrest on a principal last fall when the administrator told one of them his child had been identified as a close contact and would need to quarantine. They were charged with criminal trespassing.

“I think that school will be much more ‘normal’ than it was even last year,” said Annette Anderson, an education professor at Johns Hopkins University and deputy director of the Center for Safe and Healthy Schools.

‘Seem appropriate’

District leaders certainly hope so.

“Attendance rates had never been lower, and certainly impacted student learning,” said **Tony Sanders**, superintendent of **School District U-46**, outside Chicago. “The significant drops in attendance always correlated with spikes in COVID cases, mostly following periods when students were on break.”

The week after winter break, when the Omicron variant was prevalent, attendance fell to 72% in the district.

As the new school year begins, some districts are dropping all COVID protocols, according to **Burbio**.

Some parents, however, still want reassurances that schools will take precautions to limit exposure. Alexis Rochlin, a Los Angeles parent, said her preschooler was quarantined multiple times last year, “which was a huge pain.” But she’s comfortable with the county’s current guidelines. Close contacts are required to mask for 10 days after exposure and test three-to-five days later. Those who test positive can stop quarantining on the sixth day as long as their symptoms improve and they test negative.

“These policies seem appropriate to keep kids safe and limit learning loss. Anything less would be concerning to me,” said Rochlin, who also has a son entering second grade. “But we are in a post-COVID world, I guess, where everyone wants to live with it by ignoring it.”

The Examiner of Bartlett Administrators’ contract amended in Dist. U-46

--- 8/10/2022

By Seth Hancock – Note: This story also ran in The Examiner of South Elgin and in The Examiner of Streamwood

The **Board of Education in School District U-46** approved of amending the current administrators’ employment contract at its meeting on Monday, July 18.

The vote was 6-0, board member Melissa Owens was absent.

The resolution approving of the amendments stated the administrators’ employment contract is issued yearly by the board.

The contracts pertain to all administrators who received a yearly contract for the upcoming school year in 2022- 2023, according to the resolution. Administrators who worked in the

2021- 2022 school year were informed that they would either be offered employment or they would not be renewed for the 2022-2023 school year in writing in June.

“The Contract form has to be amended from time to time by the Board of Education to reflect legal changes or changes it deems necessary.... A number of changes have to be made to the current Contract form to reflect legal changes or changes that the Board of Education deems necessary,” the resolution states.

Mark Moore, assistant superintendent for human resources, detailed the changes to the contract which included effectively a bonus for administrators willing to return for work in 2022- 2023. That bonus was offered to other staff as well.

“The changes are minor,” Moore said. “We have increased some 224- day administrators to 229 days. So, this adds that to the contract that hadn’t been in existence before.”

Moore added: “As you offered for some other employee groups, there’s a \$1,000 payment for administrators who worked last year and are continuing this year. So, it adds that as a benefit now only. That one expires automatically once it’s paid.”

The Examiner of Bartlett U-46 expense initiatives approved via board vote --- 8/10/2022

By Seth Hancock – Note: This story also ran in The Examiner of South Elgin and in The Examiner of Streamwood

The **Board of Education in School District U-46** voted 6-0, board member Melissa Owens was absent, on a series of expense-related items at its Monday, July 18 meeting.

Included was a law firm rate increase, \$2.3 million in contract renewals, a curriculum item, a resolution detailing the budget timeline for the Fiscal Year 2023 budget and \$19.1 million in itemized bills.

The rate increase was with Chicagobased firm Nyhan, Bambrick, Kinzie & Lowry P.C. The item stated that Trisha Olson, chief legal officer, would “present the rate increase,” but no public information was provided with no board discussion nor attachment detailing how much more the firm will be paid for this rate increase.

The contract renewals included \$592,800 and \$261,175 from the tort fund for property insurance coverage from CAN and excess workers’ compensation coverage from Illinois Public Risk Fund respectively, a three-year contract renewal with Tyler Technologies costing \$630,344 (education, operations and maintenance and transportation funds) for Versatrans which provides bus routing, a three-year contract renewal with Learning A-Z for English and Spanish online reading materials costing \$594,720 (education fund) and a five-year contract costing \$252,500 (education fund) with Clevr for its forms and workflow software.

The curriculum item is for post-secondary plan strategies, for juniors, and post-secondary preparation, for seniors, courses. The total cost of the proposal is \$3,905 including one-year teacher licenses for the Purpose Prep resource (\$2,205) and professional development (\$1,700).

Curriculum for the Study Skills course for freshmen and sophomores was approved last year, and this provides standards-based curriculum for upperclassmen, according to the proposal.

As for the upcoming resolution vote related to FY 2023, it sets Aug. 22 for presentation of a tentative budget which will be put on public display on Aug. 23. The resolution sets a public hearing for Sept. 12, and the board is expected to adopt the budget Sept. 26.