

October 26, 2020

RE: Recent Rise in COVID-19 Cases in Community and Implications for Schools

Dear St. Joseph County Schools Community:

As Superintendents representing Burr Oak, Centreville, Colon, Constantine, Mendon, Nottawa, St. Joseph Intermediate School District, Sturgis, Three Rivers and White Pigeon, we first want to acknowledge your extraordinary patience during these difficult times. Your understanding during this pandemic has been critical in keeping our schools safe.

Unfortunately, public health experts report increases in positive cases across our state and region in recent weeks.

The Branch, St. Joseph, and Hillsdale County Health Department officials have reported seeing "COVID fatigue" in our community. Health officials cite that the rise in cases is largely due to a lack of safe practices -- mainly distancing and mask wearing -- in social settings and community gatherings outside of the school community. In St. Joseph County there have been minimal positive cases of students in schools, but they are exponentially growing in the community at large. If cases continue to trend upwards, county health departments warn schools may be forced to implement additional restrictions to prevent continued infections. Restrictions may include cancellation, or other mitigation efforts, of extracurricular activities like athletics, band, choir and drama. As a worst case scenario, schools may be asked to shift to a distance learning instructional model either periodically or for an extended period of time until cases decline.

Staff and student safety remains our number one priority, but we also acknowledge the important role schools serve for our broader community. School staff are vital in meeting the academic, social, emotional and physical wellbeing of students and families. We must do everything we can to keep schools safe and open.

To mitigate the spread of COVID-19 in our community and to keep our schools open, we ask that social and community gatherings continue to adhere to safe mitigation protocols. Please consider our health department's request to remain diligent on mitigation strategies like wearing a mask when you go out, staying home when you are sick, washing your hands often, keeping socially distant from others not in your immediate household, and ensuring thorough and effective disinfecting. We believe these strategies will help to reduce the chance of spread in our schools.

Together, we will get through these trying times but we know it will take a collective effort. We thank our families, students, staff, and administration for your diligent efforts in working through this school year!

Sincerely,

Kristina Owens

Kris Owens, Superintendent
Burr Oak Schools

Stephanie Lemmer

Stephanie Lemmer, Superintendent
Centreville Public Schools

Penny J Brockway

Penny Brockway, Superintendent
Colon Public Schools

Jim Wisely

Jim Wisely, Superintendent
Constantine Public Schools

Leasa Griffith

Leasa Griffith, Superintendent
Mendon Public Schools

Jerome Wolff

Jerome Wolff, Superintendent
Nottawa Public Schools

Teresa Belote

Teresa Belote, Superintendent
St. Joseph Intermediate School District

Art Ebert

Art Ebert, Superintendent
Sturgis Public Schools

Ron Moag

Ron Moag, Superintendent
Three Rivers Community Schools

Jon Keyer

Jon Keyer, Superintendent/
White Pigeon Community Schools

Carrie Erlandson

Carrie Erlandson, Associate Superintendent
White Pigeon Community Schools