



January 13, 2021

Good Morning PCS Families and Staff:

I am writing to clarify some issues that have risen to concern, and to unfortunate accusations toward other families, toward myself, misinformation, and inaccurate social media posts based on my latest Positive COVID case report sent yesterday. In that report, there is a positive case listed with the test date and last day in school showing a span of 5 days, with the test on Jan. 4 and the last day being present in school being Jan. 8. I could see how this would lead to confusion, and I will explain what I can while preserving the privacy of the individual involved as protected by FERPA privacy laws.

This individual had no symptoms at all and no known close contacts, but had a test done on Sunday, Jan. 3 out of an abundance of care, due to close family members being ill (despite not seeing them for a period of time). This individual remained home on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday (Jan 4-Jan.6) and then received a *negative PCR test* result on Jan 6 from the test done on the 3rd, and returned to school on Thursday, Jan. 7. Incidentally, this individual was with another family member who was being tested on Monday Jan 4, and the decision was made to get another test done that day. That test was purely done in an abundance of caution, and because the individual was there in the car anyway. There was no concern of being ill or positive. On Friday, that result came back *positive*, and the individual was immediately picked up from school.

I, and my contact tracing team, were notified of this unfortunate situation and timeline by a very concerned family member of the positive individual on Friday evening. This individual shared details of the situation and expressed how badly the family felt about this situation that resulted from a very unusual testing and timeline of result notifications. This individual has repeatedly expressed that they feel very badly about this, despite doing everything correctly and by the guidance, and shared that they care deeply about the kids, the teachers, and the school and would never have knowingly done anything to put anyone at risk.

Unfortunately, accusations have been made to assign blame, and to ask for consequences for what have been inaccurately determined by individuals to be intentional actions. This could not be further from the truth. These are difficult times, and it is hard for everyone, but I challenge everyone to take the high road. I know that trust is difficult to give, but try to trust in me and our really strong team who are doing our very best, often until all hours and 7 days a week, to keep

our kids, families and staff safe. Understand that this is challenging and imperfect, and there are going to be strange nuances and issues that arise on rare occasions. Above all, and seeing how things can devolve quickly to focus on the negative, or to jump to conclusions, I ask that we all try to support one another, to choose civility and respect over anger and blame, and to help one another through his incredibly hard time.

Our families have truly been tremendous, always contacting our nurses, staff and even me, looking for advice or to report even a slight concern. Our families are doing all they can to follow the rules and to help keep our schools safe, and open for the kids. The easiest thing for me to do would be to announce that we are moving to fully remote or hybrid again, but that would be an overreaction against all guidance I am receiving from the governor's office, the CDC and DPH. We monitor and share every case in the district, and with the health department, look for evidence of school outbreaks or probable school transmission. A claim was made that my statement sharing *no confirmed school transmissions* was untruthful. I hope that most families and staff understand that I have many flaws, but I am an honest person, and would not lie about such a serious issue. To date, we have just had two instances that involved two people getting COVID from the same class, and in each case, they also had a positive family member who lived in their home, which was the more likely source of infection than in schools, where kids are masked, practicing the many mitigating strategies with fidelity. Transmission is much more likely in the community and at home, often from sitting at a dinner table to eat together or through other close contact at home. We still see no evidence of confirmed school transmission, but with the new strain I mentioned being a new concern, we are watching that even more carefully. If we do see any evidence of a classroom or school outbreak, we will take swift and appropriate action to limit spread.

In closing, I urge everyone to try to take the high road, to stay calm despite being upset or experiencing adversity, and to continue to work together to get through this. The only way to overcome any challenge is through cooperation, unity, mutual respect and civility. I will also take more care in my communication where there is information that needs more of an explanation to avoid unfortunate but understandable leaps to make an incorrect judgment.

Respectfully,
Steve LePage, Superintendent of Schools