

November 13, 2020

D38 Staff and Families,

To begin, I would like to extend my sincere gratitude and appreciation to the entire D38 community for how we are weathering this persistent and pervasive Covid storm. This is a lengthy letter, but I believe it is necessary to provide as much comprehensive information as possible at this time. I encourage you to read through it fully when you are able to absorb it.

Clearly, we are experiencing a significant increase in Covid cases and the resulting impacts throughout our community. D38 has seen an exponential increase in positive cases and related quarantines over the past couple of weeks (see our [D38 Covid Dashboard](#) for more info). These trends reflect a widespread and significant surge that we are seeing in incidence rates, positivity, and hospitalizations all over El Paso County, Colorado, and much of the nation.

Accordingly, El Paso County is moving to [Level Orange \(formerly Level 3\)](#) on the Covid Dial effective today at 5:00 p.m. In Level Orange, state-level guidelines allow local school districts to decide on the most appropriate educational delivery model (whether in-person, hybrid, or remote) for their respective schools. Additionally, schools are now categorized in the [most recent public health order](#) as a “critical business” for the purposes of providing critical services to students and the general public.

We are aware that [some school districts in El Paso County and across the state](#) have already moved, or are moving, their entire district toward an e-learning or distance learning delivery model. Other districts are deciding to stay the course of offering in-person instruction as long as it is feasible. While we face the same daunting challenges as everyone else, we have to view our district’s optimal educational delivery model through our unique community context. **As of this update, D38 is choosing to remain in-person across all school sites with the intent to continue full-time in-person instruction at our elementary schools and the hybrid schedule at our secondary schools. Our reasons include the following:**

1. By and large, Covid transmission is not happening inside of our schools. The vast majority of cases are occurring within the broader community and then brought into our schools at a relative rate. Since mid-August, we have had four confirmed outbreaks ([Learn more](#) about the criteria used to define an outbreak in a school setting).
2. In-school outbreaks are infrequent and generally reflect a wider spread trend from the community. These trends are reflected in current state-level outbreak data which you can reference in a [recent CDPHE report](#). Since August, we have diligently followed appropriate precautions - wearing a mask, physically distancing, adhering to good hand hygiene, and consistent cleaning/disinfecting practices. Evidence supports that these efforts have been effective.
3. In looking closer at [state-level data](#) regarding transmission rates within schools and at our current trends in D38, we have learned that student-to-student transmission is very rare at the elementary and middle levels and more prevalent in high school students (additional note: high school student-to-student transmission has been happening outside of school and outside of school-sanctioned events). When we see occasional staff-to-staff transmission, it is more frequent at the elementary level and far less frequent at the middle and high schools. Further, it appears that staff generally are contracting the virus away from schools and in the local community.

4. While we have experienced struggles involved in persisting with in-person and hybrid instruction, including the related disruptions when isolations and quarantines occur, we have heard from numerous students, staff, and families a strong desire to continue to remain in-person as much and for as long as possible.
5. We have also seen endless examples of resilience, fortitude, and teamwork demonstrated by our dedicated D38 workforce. I am so incredibly proud of how **Our Team** continues to respond to the challenges we face on a daily basis.

Beyond the above rationale, I want to elevate a few other related issues (not a full comprehensive list):

1. What we are doing right now is hard on everyone. The unpredictability of isolations and quarantine notifications, along with related disruptions, makes it difficult on our students, staff, and families.
2. While our entire staff are nothing short of heroes in how they continue to press on, there is a definite strain, toll, and burden that they continue to shoulder every day.
3. District leadership has daily conversations with our building principals about the impacts of Covid at their respective campuses. We acknowledge that the day-to-day impacts at each campus are unique and involve several factors related to maintaining normal operations and providing a coherent educational process at each school site.
4. In addition to our in-school operations, we also have to continually assess our district-wide operational capacity to support our schools staying open. This includes the functionality of grounds and maintenance teams, our food service crew, tech support, and the transportation department. Our entire system is interwoven in so many ways. If one domino falls the right (or wrong) way, it has a ripple effect.

With all of this in mind, here is how we are moving forward at this time:

1. As of this letter, all D38 schools will continue to remain open for in-person and hybrid learning into next week (November 16-20).
2. **The district is closed for the entire week of Thanksgiving Break (November 23-27).** In order for our staff to have the chance to relax and refresh, all district operations and communications will shut down for the full week. Despite that, we need staff and families to continue to send any information regarding positive tests/symptoms through the week so we can respond to them as we are able prior to school starting again on November 30.
3. We currently anticipate resuming in-person and hybrid learning the week following our Thanksgiving break (beginning on November 30). In short, for as long as we can, our goal is to continue to provide an in-person learning environment while adhering to all safety protocols.
4. For now, D38 will be approaching educational delivery model decisions on a school-by-school basis. In the event that Covid-related impacts indicate the need to shift into 100% distance learning mode at a specific school site, our goal is to provide as much lead time to each respective school community before making the decision to pivot. We envision a **minimum** of a 24-hour advance notice for staff and students to prepare for distance learning via synchronous instruction. If this happens, each school will share their respective schedules with their families. In the event that a school shifts to 100% distance learning, students and families will be responsible for engaging in the distance learning format as specified.
5. It is vital that all schools in D38 are prepared for the realistic potential of having to postpone in-person learning and prepare for a shift to distance learning.
6. Due to the large amount of time involved in contact tracing, we will only be contacting individuals who are directly involved in the isolation or quarantine protocols. **Beginning immediately, our**

schools will not be communicating these individual impacts across the entire school. This will hopefully alleviate some confusion for the broader school community. For specific site/district quarantine information, please visit our [Covid Dashboard](#), or if you have additional questions, contact your school's main office directly.

7. Continued flexibility - on everyone's part - is essential as we move forward.

In closing, we've shared a great deal of information in this letter. I want to reiterate that I am so grateful for our continued collective efforts to do our part to keep our schools open and our students learning. I would also like to encourage you to be extra safe over the Thanksgiving holiday and subsequent weeks. Please continue to wear a mask, stay physically distanced, and apply all appropriate safety precautions. I am confident that we can continue to work our way through these challenges together. Thank you again, stay well, and please take care!

In gratitude and partnership,

K.C. Somers, Ed.D.

Superintendent

Lewis-Palmer School District 38

