



ELKINS SCHOOL DISTRICT

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November 23, 2020

Parents and Guardians,

I hope this letter finds you and your family well, and preparing to enjoy the Thanksgiving holiday season. You are likely aware of the increasing number of COVID-19 cases around the state, and unfortunately we are seeing that same trend at Elkins School District. Until the end of last week our number of confirmed positive cases had been very small. So small in fact that it was below the threshold for what the Arkansas Department of Health advised should be legally published. ADH counseled school leaders in August that if the active case count was below five total cases then school districts should not share case counts in order to avoid a potential HIPAA violation. In accordance with that guidance ESD has not been publishing case counts. We have seen a surge of positive cases in recent days that has put us over the threshold of five or more active cases which means we will now be keeping a running total of confirmed case counts on the district website under the COVID-19 tab.

Currently, ESD is aware of twelve (12) active cases of COVID-19 between students and staff members. This is a substantial increase within the past week as we only had seven (7) confirmed total cases between students and staff members over the first twelve (12) weeks of school, and during that period there were never more than three active cases at any time. Another COVID-19 data point that has been watched carefully throughout the school year is the ADH's COVID-19 Local View that can be found at this web address: <https://achi.net/covid19/>. This webpage will allow you to filter by county, city limit, school district boundaries, and zip code. One important note is that when filtering by school district boundaries to look at data it does not mean that you are looking at the cases among students and staff specifically. The cases listed are totals from all persons, regardless of age, that reside inside the district boundary lines. You can click on each individual district in the map to get a pop up box that will give you the more specific data about cases within the school district. Also, the districts are color coded with green being the lowest case numbers and red/purple being the highest case numbers. Elkins School District has been green for the entire school year with the exception of one week in October when we dipped to yellow for a few days before moving back to green. That changed this past Friday when our district dipped to orange status on the map.

I want to be clear that I am not announcing any type of shift or pivot to virtual learning in any of our schools, and as of this point the Division of Elementary and Secondary Education and Governor Asa Hutchinson have been clear about the expectation to continue onsite instruction unless it is not possible. Based on current information we will be back in session on Monday, November 30, 2020 as planned. If that changes due to increased confirmed positive cases over the holiday break you will be notified, but no change is anticipated currently.

With more positive cases come more students that are ordered to quarantine. Many of you have dealt with or will soon be dealing with your child(ren) being quarantined after it has been determined that the student was a Probable Close Contact (PCC) to a confirmed positive case. I want to remind you of the protocols established by ADH and DESE regarding contact tracing within the school that we are required to follow.

- When notified of a positive case our District Point of Contact (POC) immediately begins the contact tracing process. This contact tracing is limited to exposure while at school or school activities.
- Any student or staff member that meets the definition set by ADH as a PCC is contacted along with the parent/guardian and notified of the 14-day quarantine. If a student/staff is within six feet of a confirmed positive case for 15 cumulative minutes during a 24-hour period then that person meets the definition of a PCC.
- Students/staff that are identified as PCC's are strongly encouraged, but not required, to be tested for COVID-19 on day five after exposure or sooner if symptoms develop.

- When a student/staff member is identified as a PCC that person is not told who exposed them unless it is necessary to complete the contact tracing process. Parents should not demand to be told who the person was that exposed their child as this information will not be shared. This is prohibited by law.
- If you have multiple children in the district it is very possible that one of them could get quarantined while the others are still allowed to go to school. Again, ESD is following ADH protocol by allowing the siblings to remain in attendance. The siblings are considered to be secondary contacts, and will not be required to quarantine unless someone living in the residence tests positive. If you choose to keep all siblings home when one of them is quarantined that is permitted, but you must notify the district POC and/or building principal of this decision.
- While under quarantine, students will still need to complete their work from home as virtual students until the end of the quarantine period.
- There is a COVID-19 hotline number that can be called to report a positive case seven days per week. That number is 844-247-7471.

Our teachers and other staff members have worked extremely hard this school year to make the school environment as safe as possible, and largely we have been successful at preventing the spread of COVID-19 in our schools. Also, our students have done a fantastic job of complying with new rules and directives. However, we all have to continue to be diligent about following the guidelines in order to slow the spread. Elkins School District will be heavily sanitizing all school buildings and district facilities during the Thanksgiving break, and we ask that you continue to work with us in order to make our schools as safe as possible. Encourage your children to wear their mask, wash their hands, distance when possible. Please screen your child(ren) for symptoms daily before school, and keep them home if they are sick. Our goal is to provide a safe, high-quality educational environment for all of our students and staff members, and I am confident we can do that with everyone working together.

Go Elks!

Jeremy Mangrum
Superintendent