

2021-22 COVID-19 Media Release #11

Dear Mellen Community,

We have successfully navigated the first semester of school. However, due to the recent increase in COVID-19 cases within the District, the difficult decision was made to mandate masking until positive cases and close contacts are less than 5% for two weeks. The masking mandate does include all spectators at extracurricular events. This decision was made in compliance with the Mellen School District Response Plan approved by the Ashland County Health Department, the School Attorney, the School's Liability Carrier, and the Mellen School Board.

At this time we have one staff member and fifteen students that have tested positive for COVID-19 and an additional twenty-five students on quarantine due to close contact. Due to the antigen rapid test shortage we are not able to clear close contacts in a more timely fashion. We ask for continued communication from parents if their child(ren) become ill with COVID-19 like symptoms or test positive for COVID-19 to notify the school immediately. This information is vital to keeping everyone safe and completing accurate contact tracing and notification.

The School District continues to offer free onsite lab based testing Monday, Wednesday and Friday from 7:30am to 3:30pm. We are only able to provide testing to the students that parents/guardians have given consent. Therefore, I strongly encourage parents/guardians to complete the consent form available at <https://register.covidconnect.wi.gov/en-US/>. The testing is also open to family members of students by calling the main office ahead of time. The School District will be offering an onsite vaccination clinic on 2/2/2022 and 2/23/2022. Ages 5 and up are eligible for the vaccine. We will also be offering a booster shot to ages 12 and older.

In an effort to provide our students a quality onsite educational experience, while maintaining a safe and healthy learning environment, the following updates were recommended at the January School Board meeting:

1. Per CDC Recommendations:
 - a. Reduce the quarantine timeline from 10 days to 5 days
 - b. Reduce the masking requirement timeline from 14 days to 10 days
2. Recommend allowing extra-curricular busses to be able to stop for food
3. Recommend opening the gym and fitness center pending decrease in COVID-19 cases and close contacts to < 5%

We are working diligently to provide a quality educational experience for our students while keeping the health and safety of our students and staff a priority. We ask that parents/guardians continue with the daily screening of their children and keep them home if they are multi-symptomatic.

On another note, the School District currently has \$2,709.50 in unpaid food service bills. These bills are carried over from 2018-19, prior to the implementation of the CEP program in which all students are eligible for free meals. Due to the financial constraints of some of our families, these bills are unable to be paid. For the same reasons, the District also has \$331.00 of unpaid technology invoices from lost and/or broken Chromebooks. If you are interested in learning more about how to help, please contact Superintendent Friemoth at 715-274-3601.

We are thankful for the continued support of our families, friends, community members, staff, and students. We are grateful for your continued patience and understanding as we continue to navigate this unknown path. We know that the pandemic has been incredibly challenging for you and your loved ones. Please know that we are thinking about you and are here to help.

As we move forward, I welcome your calls or emails so that I can explain our work and answer any questions you may have.

Sincerely,
Rhonda Elmhurst-Friemoth
Superintendent, Mellen School District