

Press Clippings 7/30/2022 to 8/1/2022

Daily Herald

What schools are saying about mask policies so far as COVID-19 cases are up 10 percent--- 7/31/2022

By Marni Pyke



Several suburban districts are saying they will continue policies of recommending but not mandating face masks. *Brian Hill | Staff Photographer, March 2021*

With schools on the verge of welcoming kids back once again amid a pandemic, several suburban districts will continue policies of recommending but not mandating face masks.

At **Elgin Area School District U-46**, "masks will not be required, but encouraged. We staffed at the same levels as last year in order to try to increase social distancing to the best of our abilities," said **Tony Sanders**, superintendent of the state's second-largest district.

"As in past years, not just for COVID but to prevent all illness (including influenza), we all need to practice appropriate behavior to prevent the spread of any virus, such as observing proper hand hygiene.

"We also will continue to encourage vaccinations for viruses including COVID and influenza," said Sanders, adding a detailed plan will be presented at an Aug. 8 meeting.

The update comes as highly contagious variants of COVID-19 proliferate in the region. The average of new cases of COVID-19 climbed by 9.6% in a week, while hospitalizations grew by 3%, Illinois Department of Public Health data showed Friday.

The Daily Herald sampled a number of districts across the suburbs on back-to-school COVID-19 policies. The state relaxed a masking rule in schools in February amid legal battles as hospitalizations decreased.

In Cook County, Northwest Suburban High School District 214 "will continue to carefully review the recommendations of our local health department as we do with other communicable diseases," spokesperson David Beery said.

Regarding face coverings, "individuals continue to have the opportunity to wear masks," Beery said.

At Woodland Elementary District 50 in Lake County, "we will have masks available if anyone wishes to wear one," spokesperson Brooke Hagstrom said.

"The main thing we are doing is continuing to offer weekly SHIELD testing for those that wish to participate," Hagstrom said, referring to saliva-based test program created by the University of Illinois.

She said the district will continue with "some of our heightened cleaning practices" and offer visual cues to encourage kids to distance and wash their hands. "But we will not be requiring desks to be a certain number of feet apart, and it will be normal cafeteria practices," she said.

Meanwhile in Naperville Unit District 203, "we are working on finalizing our plans for the school year and will be sharing soon with the community," spokesperson Alex Mayster said.

Illinois' largest district, [Chicago Public Schools](#), will continue with a masks "strongly recommended" policy, officials said.

On Friday, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control reported 66 Illinois counties are registering high rates of virus transmission, including the entire Chicago region.

The seven-day average for new cases stands at 5,053, compared to 4,610 on July 22. Hospitalizations for COVID-19 reached an average of about 1,449 patients Thursday, in contrast to nearly 1,406 on July 21.

New daily cases of COVID-19 totaled 5,913 Friday, with five more people dying from the respiratory disease. The seven-day average for deaths is seven people, a number that remains fairly constant.

Patients in the hospital with COVID-19 came to 1,459 as of Thursday night.

On Thursday, 13,031 more COVID-19 shots were administered, higher than the seven-day average of 12,671.

So far, 8,780,574 Illinoisans have been fully vaccinated, or 69.3% of the state's 12.7 million population, according to the CDC. The agency defines fully vaccinated as two doses of the Pfizer or Moderna vaccine, or one dose of Johnson & Johnson's.

Total COVID-19 cases statewide stand at 3,563,653, and 34,357 Illinoisans have died since the pandemic began.

Chicago Tribune

Schools ‘cautiously optimistic’ about new year, but COVID-19 worries linger. ‘Don’t forget about people with extreme circumstances.’ --- 8/1/2022

By Karen Ann Cullotta



Laquitta Boyd holds 6-year-old daughter Venisha getting her first COVID-19 vaccination at a back-to-school health fair at the Salvation Army Freedom Center on July 30, 2022, in Chicago’s Humboldt Park neighborhood. (John J. Kim / Chicago Tribune)

For the first time since the arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic, Illinois students will soon begin a new school year in which hotly contested virus-mitigation mandates, including masking, have become relegated to the history books — at least for now.

“I’m cautiously optimistic, because when students returned last fall, we were hopeful that the 2021-2022 school year would be more ‘normal,’ and it turned out not to be,” said Terri Bresnahan, superintendent of Elk Grove Village-based Community Consolidated School District 59.

“I’m just more realistic now, and as we are making this latest transition, we need to ask ourselves, ‘How do we live with it?’ We just all need do our best, and do what we know works and is effective so we can keep our schools open for in-person learning,” Bresnahan said.

As Illinois students return to the classroom in the coming weeks for the 2022-23 school year — the fourth school year to unfold during the lingering pandemic — educators, parents and pediatricians are hopeful the worst of the COVID-19 disruptions are behind them.

But with the launch of the new school year coinciding with the surge of the highly contagious BA.5 variant, some say the state’s loosening of COVID-19 guidance could lead to a rash of student and staff absences and disruptions at Illinois schools this fall.

While the state’s school mask mandate was halted in spring amid a flurry of legal challenges to the governor’s executive order, this new school year will be the first since fall 2019 in which students are returning to classrooms with few if any COVID-19 restrictions.

Chicago Public Schools CEO Pedro Martinez said this week the district will “strongly recommend,” but not require masks for the upcoming school year, which begins Aug. 22. But the district’s weekly, optional in-school testing program will continue, and take-home tests will be available to students.



CPS CEO Pedro Martinez listens on June 22, 2022, at a Board of Education meeting. (Brian Cassella / Chicago Tribune)

The school board recently approved an \$85 million contract for this school year with Fisher Scientific, a company tasked with continuing to provide COVID-19 testing supplies and services to the state’s largest school district, which enrolls about 330,000 students.

At John Hersey High School in Arlington Heights, Principal Keir Rogers led a group of freshmen on a building tour earlier this week, a contingent of students who have been dealing with the pandemic since they were in fifth grade.

“Student mental health is an obvious concern right now, and these tours help acclimate freshmen to the school building, making them more comfortable, which helps ease their anxiety,” Rogers said.

While summer reading in the past featured an assortment of fiction and nonfiction books based on grade level, in an effort to support students’ emotional health, this year all 2,100

students at Hersey were assigned to read “The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens” by Sean Covey, Rogers said.

“We’re mindful there still is a pandemic, and we need to respect that some people still feel it’s necessary to wear a mask,” Rogers said. “In our community, we put aside any judgment of the choice students and staff make about masks.”

Given the anticipated majority of students who will arrive in classrooms unmasked this fall, parent Jacqueline Helm is worried her daughter Bronwyn, 16, will have a tough time being one of the few teens still masking at Wheaton Warrenville South High School.

Helm said Bronwyn’s father is 78 and suffers from compromised heart function due to complications from cancer surgery, putting him in several high-risk categories for potentially severe illness from COVID-19. This has made the family extra cautious.

“My daughter is really anxious about going back to school because she is worried she’s going to be the only kid wearing a mask,” Helm said.

“It will not be any different than it was at the end of the last school year, when masks became optional, and Bronwyn will be facing the same situation,” Helm said. “I accept the school is doing what the majority wants them to do, but I would ask them, ‘Don’t forget about people with extreme circumstances.’”

Chris Beer, a Wilmette mother of two who is among the contingent of Illinois parents strongly opposed to the governor’s school mask mandate, said she hopes “the 2022-2023 school year gives families the choice to do what feels right for their children.”

“Mask mandates in school do more harm than good,” said Beer, whose children, 10 and 12, attend Wilmette School District 39.

“Mask wearing interferes with social development, including a child’s ability to identify emotions and connect with peers and educators,” Beer said.

Opinions about the pros and cons of school mask requirements vary dramatically among parents. But according to the latest guidance from the Illinois Department of Public Health, when communities are at a high-risk level, “the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends universal indoor masking as masks are critical to keeping classrooms open for in-person learning.”

As of Friday, all six counties covering the Chicago area reported high community levels, an assessment based on a combination of hospitalization rates and the number of new COVID-19 cases in those counties. According to the CDC, [66 counties in Illinois are rated at high-community level](#) for COVID-19 transmission. An additional 31 counties are rated at medium community level.

“In all Community Levels, staff and students with COVID-19-like symptoms, a positive test, or exposure to someone with COVID-19 should wear a mask around others,” according to IDPH.

“Schools should also consider implementing screening testing for high-risk activities such as indoor sports and extracurricular activities, when students are returning from breaks, and for those serving students who are at high risk for getting very sick with COVID-19,” IDPH officials said.

The new language used by the state’s health department includes terms like “strongly encourage,” and “recommends,” rather than the previous “required,” which was abandoned when the state lifted its mask mandate in the spring.

A spokeswoman for the Illinois State Board of Education said the “goal continues to be to have as many students as possible learning in schools, while protecting health and safety. “

“While we can’t predict what the school year will bring, we remain focused on supporting students’ recovery, both academically and with their mental health,” ISBE spokeswoman Jackie Matthews said in a statement.

ISBE distributed updated public health guidance to all Illinois schools earlier this month, along with “detailed guidance for evaluating symptomatic students and close contacts for exclusion, and guidance regarding school testing programs,” Matthews said.

The state guidance reflects CDC guidance, “which recommends a variety of different mitigations, such as masking and testing, depending on the community level,” Matthews said.

“School districts are strongly encouraged to follow the guidance; the only requirement, however, continues to be that all school personnel must be vaccinated or tested for COVID-19 at least weekly,” Matthews said.

While the COVID-19 vaccine is now available for children as young as 6 months, dismal vaccination rates for youngsters nationwide has been disappointing to many pediatricians who contend the shots are the best and only way for schools to achieve the so-called return to “normal.”

In Illinois, only about 5.3% of children under age 5 have received at least one dose of the COVID-19 vaccine nearly a month after the youngsters became eligible for the shots.

“It is not unexpected, but it is very disappointing to see this much resistance to COVID vaccines for these younger kids,” said Dr. Allison Bartlett, a pediatric infectious disease specialist at the University of Chicago Medicine.

Bartlett hopes Illinois students, including her own children, will be able to experience in-person classroom learning this school year with minimal disruptions. But she remains concerned by the prevalence of the virus coupled with low vaccine rates.

“As a parent living through this with school-aged children, I know the disruptions have been huge ... and COVID is not going away,” Bartlett said.

“The single most important thing parents can do is get their children vaccinated,” said Dr. Daniel Johnson, a professor of pediatrics at the University of Chicago Medicine Comer Children’s Hospital.

“We know vaccination greatly reduces the risk of hospitalization, just like other vaccines for influenza, chicken pox and hepatitis,” Johnson said.

Now, with the BA.5 variant circulating widely, Johnson said the risk of transmission is higher “because it is dramatically more contagious than the earlier omicron variant.”

“I really can’t overstate enough that these vaccines are to protect children,” Johnson added.

Tony Sanders, superintendent of **Elgin-based School District U-46**, said he is encouraging families to get their students vaccinated, as well as continuing to follow common sense practices that are known to stem transmission of the virus.

“Everyone is looking forward to and hoping for a more normal school year, but in the back of my mind, I know what the data looks like, and it’s not lost on me that COVID will still be part of our lives, as is the flu,” Sanders said. “I think people have gotten more comfortable, and many have taken their masks off, and are not washing their hands as frequently. They also should get vaccinated, and get a flu shot, too.”

Sanders said U-46 will continue to rely on guidance from the local health departments regarding COVID-19 risk levels in the counties where the district’s 53 schools enrolling around 36,000 students are located.

Dan Montgomery, president of the Illinois Federation of Teachers, said that with 94% of union members vaccinated, officials will continue to monitor school districts’ safety protocol, including ensuring school buildings have “proper ventilation, soap in the bathrooms and hand sanitizer ... all of the things that keep our students and staff healthy.”

While Illinois school employees are not required to mask, Montgomery said he believes most union members will opt to wear them anyway.

“We’re talking about teachers who have five sets of 20 to 30 students coming into their classrooms each day, and are walking through crowded hallways and lunchrooms,” he said.

“At the start of the school year, you walk in the school building and the floors are waxed, there are new books and supplies in the classrooms, and it feels just great,” Montgomery said. “It’s a bright start and a new start, and just like every school year teachers will be starting this new school year with hope and optimism.”

Daily Herald

Elgin-area barbershops offer free back-to-school haircuts for students in need --- 8/1/2022

By Madhu Krishnamurthy



Wilbur Dumas, Jr., 39, of Elgin, left, cuts the hair of Jose Gomez. Dumas' Lincoln Avenue Barbershop and other local barbershops will provide free back-to-school haircuts to students in need Aug. 14. *Courtesy of Wilbur Dumas*

For the second year, several Elgin-area barbershops will provide free haircuts for students in need on Aug. 14 before they head back to school.

Haircuts and hairdos will be offered from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. at the Boys and Girls Club of Elgin, 355 Dundee Ave., Elgin. It is open to students from kindergarten through 12th grade.

Wilbur Dumas Jr., who opened Lincoln Avenue Barbershop in Elgin five years ago because he wanted to give back to the community, is leading the effort. Dumas, 39, of Elgin, is a product of the Boys and Girls Club of Elgin and a graduate of **Larkin High School** in Elgin.

"We got about 20 barbers," Dumas said. "We're accommodating the Elgin-area Boys and Girls Club youth and anybody that ... can't afford haircuts."

At last year's event, Dumas and fellow barbers provided 42 free haircuts. Attendance was limited due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

"This year is going to be much bigger," Dumas said. "Families are looking forward to this. I want this to get bigger and bigger every year. You look good, you feel good. That's always been my motto."

Participating businesses include Sauvage Barber Parlor in South Elgin, Fade Stars Barbershop in Elgin, In The Cuts Hair Studio in Elgin, Tapered Edges in West Dundee, and Bea's Touch of Style in Elgin.

Free school supplies

Dumas is coordinating the hair cutting with Elgin's annual backpack giveaway organized by Elgin City Council member Corey Dixon.

It's the fifth year for the backpack giveaway, which will provide free school supplies to students from low-income families from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. on Aug. 14, said Dixon, a childhood friend of Dumas.

Dixon said COVID threw a major curveball into his back-to-school barbecue bash usually held at Wing Park in Elgin. This year, the giveaway is moving indoors to the Boys and Girls Club.

"We are still going to provide backpacks, school supplies and food to families," he said. "We plan on giving away at least 100 (backpacks)."

There also will be social service agencies providing tax preparation and financial management consulting to families.

Dixon said he wanted to focus more on the hair cutting and styling portion of the event this year.

"It is targeted at whoever needs it. It doesn't matter if you're Black, brown, white, Hispanic, Asian. We have people who can cut anyone's hair," Dixon said. "We are partnering with Black-owned and Hispanic-owned businesses."

The Examiner of Bartlett

U-46 Board approves series of expenditures --- 7/27/2022

By Seth Hancock: Note – This story also ran in The Examiner of South Elgin and in The Examiner of Streamwood

The **Board of Education in School District U-46** voted unanimously to approve \$6 million in expenditure items at its June 20 meeting.

Items presented largely came from the education fund, the largest education items being \$499,990 with Warehouse Direct, Garvey's and Frank Cooney for library furniture at five schools and \$483,529 for a three-year contract renewal with Blackboard.

Several testing items were approved including \$392,065 with the College Board for AP exams, \$228,000 with Northwest Evaluation Association for MAP tests, \$79,469 with the College Board for PSAT tests, \$52,092 with Riverside Insight for CogAT tests and \$40,000 with LTI for Assessment of Performance toward Proficiency in Languages exams.

The district will spend \$369,985 with CDW-G for Google Workspace Education Plus, \$216,176 with DeMoulin for South Elgin High School marching band uniforms, \$141,286 with JX Truck Center for a distribution center truck replacement, \$138,919 with Estrellita and Scholastic for reading intervention resources, \$130,304 with CDW-G for Microsoft licenses and \$51,930 with Microsystems, Inc. to convert former employee files to a digital format.

Also, from the education fund is \$75,000 to provide a stipend for up to 10 teacher candidates from Tennessee State University, a historically Black college.

Items to be paid for by the nation's taxpayers through grant funds is \$1.7 million with 13 vendors for speech and language therapists, \$336,760 with two vendors for school psychology services, \$226,642 with Johnson Controls for middle school camera installation, \$203,000 with Geneva Hearing Services for audiology services, \$176,354 with Northwest Illinois Association for hearing and vision supervision and services, \$153,747 for News2You online resources and \$141,617 with Data Recognition Corporation for the LAS Links assessment for dual language.

One operations and maintenance fund item approved was \$160,921 to Brightly Software for work order software.

Several resolutions were unanimously approved including a hazardous transportation area designation stating "there have been no changes in conditions" from last year, to transfer \$300,000 of interest earnings from the working cash fund to the operations and maintenance fund, allowing participation in federal and state programs and to allow the treasurer to make bond and interest payments.

A modification to a 2001 intergovernmental agreement with the Streamwood Park District as well as \$19.1 million in itemized bills were also unanimously approved.

The Examiner of Bartlett

New board policy manual approved by District U-46 ---

7/27/2022

By Seth Hancock: Note – This story also ran in The Examiner of South Elgin and in The Examiner of Streamwood

The **Board of Education in School District U-46** approved of a new board policy manual at its meeting on Monday, July 18.

The vote was 6-0, board member Melissa Owens was absent.

The new policy manual will align with the taxpayer-funded organization Illinois Association of School Board's (IASB) model policies.

There was no discussion or overview presented on what changes were made to board policies with this shift to the IASB's PRESS Plus which allows the lobbyist group access to update U-46 policies.

The new policy manual, which is 395 pages, was not posted for public inspection on the board's documents page prior to the vote. The policy manual that is now posted states it was ready, pending adoption, on May 24.

Board members attempted to reassure that the board will still discuss policies and that the policy manual needed to be approved in order to be ready for upcoming updates from the IASB.

"I just want to remind the public that we will be going back and looking at the different sections and making sure items that were brought up at our previous committee meetings have been addressed," said board member **Dawn Martin**. "But we're voting to have a policy in place so that we have a policy in place as the updates come in."

"This is a living document," said **Sue Kerr**, the board's president. "It is always being updated either by us or by Springfield."

Kerr suggested that the board will likely create a policy subcommittee in the future.

The policy manual has eight sections including school district organization (three policies), board of education (31 policies), general school administration (10 policies), operational services (29 policies), personnel (40 policies), instruction (43 policies), students (43 policies) and community relations (12 policies).

The Examiner of South Elgin

Board honors North Stars, state softball champions ---

7/27/2022

By Seth Hancock

The Village Board of Trustees recognized the St. Charles North softball team for capturing this year's IHSA Class 4A state championship at its meeting on Monday, July 18.

The North Stars, who finished the season 27-4 overall, captured the state title on June 11 after a 3-2 win over Marist in the title game.

South Elgin residents are split in two school districts, those in **School District U-46** attending **South Elgin High School** and those in District 303 attending St. Charles North High School.

“I don’t know what to say,” said Village President Steve Ward. “You guys are really good.... You guys really made us proud.”

Ward added: “Your parents, they’re a big part, big part. So, they should be looked at also as winners in this situation.”

North’s team is relatively young with only four seniors: Ashlee Chantos, Meghan Nicastro, Auburn Roberson and Morgan Lahner. Juniors are Leigh Vande Hei, Julia Larson, Sophia Olman, Margo Geary, Ava Goettel and Megan Bauwens along with sophomores Maddie Hernandez and Skyla Ritter as well as freshmen Mackenzie Patterson and Paige Murray.

“Thank you for having us because it’s really special, honestly, to be able to represent St. Charles and South Elgin,” said North coach Tom Poulin. “Not everybody gets to do things like that, and we took that to heart [when] we went to Peoria. This group really represented our school community the way we would want it represented.”

Poulin added: “They were able to overcome and achieve and battle through an awful lot of tough situations throughout the tournament. They really showed a championship material on the way to winning this, the first state championship for our school in the spring. This was just a true team that played for each other and cared about each other.”

Chicago Tribune/Daily Southtown State of change: Scouting the top teams in boys’ basketball from the Chicago Tribune’s suburban publications ---

7/31/2022

From Staff Reports

Sure, tipoff time for boys’ basketball is months away, but the games have already begun.

While many high school players are with AAU teams in July, important questions have bubbled to the surface as transfers abound. Who’s coming? Who’s going?

It’s a constant state of change.

The Chicago Tribune’s suburban publications cover some of the top teams in Illinois and Indiana — guards, forwards and centers, all trying to power programs to championships.

Today, in the third and final part of a weeklong three-part series, we take a look at those teams from a coverage area that runs from Wisconsin's border through Chicago's suburbs into Indiana.

This is what we're seeing:

Bartlett

Bartlett coach Jim Wolfsmith knows he could be in for a long night if he gets a text from junior guard Kelton McEwen asking whether Wolfsmith can open up the gym.

"Ninety percent of high school kids when they get in the gym, they just start jacking up shots," Wolfsmith said. "He's got cones. He's doing drills. He's going hard.

"He'll do it for two hours to the point where we're like, 'Dude, it's 10. We need to get to bed.' That's this kid."

The hard work has started to pay off for McEwen, who enters his third varsity season as the Hawks' No. 1 option.

With 7-foot-3 Conrad Luczynski graduated and off to prep school in Missouri, it's McEwen's turn to run the show.

"We want to play faster, get up and down the court," McEwen said. "We lack some size down low. We want to put up a lot of points. I'm excited to see how this season works out."



Bartlett's Kelton McEwen (2) puts up a shot over East Aurora's Ibrahim Koroma during a game in Bartlett on Friday, Jan. 14, 2022. (Brian O'Mahoney / The Courier-News)

Wolfsmith also is excited to see how things change.

"It will be eye-opening for all of us," Wolfsmith said. "It will change our style dramatically.

“It will be good for (McEwen). It’s going to be a different type of team he’s going to be leading. I’m excited for that challenge.”

In anticipation of the bigger workload, McEwen has been playing high-level AAU basketball this summer with the Illinois Wolves. He also has become dedicated in the weight room.

“Over the last few years, a big thing I wanted to work on was getting stronger, putting on weight and improving my athleticism,” he said.

Wolfsmith has seen that evolution over the past three years.

“As a coach, he’s exactly what you want as a point guard,” Wolfsmith said. “He just wants to win. He makes good decisions. The kid is just built for the moment.”