



Update #15 – November 13, 2020

Santa Fe R-X Community:

I hope that this update finds you doing well! Let's start with some positive notes: It's been a beautiful fall, harvest was spectacular, and we have been able to keep our doors open for our students here at Santa Fe!

It has been a while since anything newsworthy on the Covid-19 front has occurred here at Santa Fe, thus the pause in updates. However, yesterday morning the Governor, along with the state Department of Education (DESE) and the Department of Health and Senior Services (DHSS) held a joint press conference to announce new guidelines for how school officials are able to contact trace for purposes of quarantining students.

To this point, any student/staff member who was deemed a 'close contact' with a positive case at school was put on quarantine, regardless if one, or even both were wearing a mask during the exposure. The new guidelines from DESE/DHSS allow for students/staff who are exposed **at school** to stay in school if the following are met:

- The close contact is non-symptomatic
- Both the positive case and the contact must be wearing masks as intended
- The school district must have a mask mandate in place

This, then, begs the question if the district will now impose a mask mandate for students, staff and patrons. Prior to sharing that decision, I would like to share some data sets that I have used to make this decision. We have had a total of 77 people quarantined so far this year, 66 students (some multiple times) and 11 staff. Of those, we have had 5 positive students cases and 2 positive staff cases. Of these 77 quarantines, 65 have been as a result of contact *outside of school*. There are two sets of data here of note, the first being that we have only had 7 positive cases with just 21 days left in the semester. Second, over 84% of our quarantines have occurred because of incidents outside of school. The new guidelines for quarantine would not apply in those cases; those exposures would still be placed in quarantine.

With this information in mind, the question is whether to take the liberty of choice away from students, staff and patrons in regards to wearing masks versus the possibility of decreasing the number of quarantines by enforcing such a mandate. There's no clean cut answer. My decision, however, will be to stay the present course; there will be no mask order/mandate. Moving forward, if data suggests that I should reconsider this decision, I will most certainly do that. This mandate could be put in place at any time and then lifted at any time, influenced by the information in front of me. I am grateful that we have experienced such a small number of positive cases and pray it stays that way.

Also, you may have heard that some area schools have already or are planning to close their doors in the coming week. As stated prior, we will keep our doors open as long as we can to educate our kids. That's our job.

To close, I would like to thank our patrons, especially those who may disagree with my decisions, as none have been openly disrespectful in any way towards me personally or towards the district. This class and basic decency exemplifies Santa Fe Pride.

Respectfully,

**Derek Lark
Superintendent
Santa Fe R-X School District**