

Public Comment by Superintendent

July 15, 2021

Beginning on Friday, June 11th, Illinois entered Phase 5. Under these guidelines, capacity limits for both indoor and outdoor events were lifted while people who have been fully vaccinated were no longer required to wear masks in most environments.

From that moment on the New Berlin Administration has been cautiously optimistic that guidance from the CDC, the IDPH, and ISBE would be forthcoming.

Last week, I joined a group of superintendents across the state promoting a resolution that used the #MakeItLocalIL. In this resolution, we requested that the governor provide local control to school districts and locally elected school boards to make decisions regarding social distancing and the wearing of masks. That item is on the agenda tonight and I continue to request that the Board of Education adopt it even though some superintendents consider it a moot point at this time. More than 30 other states have already declared for local control and it is time for Illinois to adopt the same model.

On Friday, the CDC finally posted guidance. I want to point out three bullet points in the guidance:

- Masks should be worn indoors by all individuals (age 2 and older) who are not fully vaccinated. Consistent and correct mask use by people who are not fully vaccinated is especially important indoors and in crowded settings, when physical distancing cannot be maintained.
- CDC recommends schools maintain at least 3 feet of physical distance between students within classrooms, combined with indoor mask wearing by people who are not fully vaccinated, to reduce transmission risk.
- During school transportation, CDC's mandates passengers and drivers must wear a mask on school buses, including on buses operated by public and private school systems, subject to the exclusions and exemptions in CDC's Order. This includes all passengers and drivers regardless of vaccination status.

There are two important words in those bullets. They are "should" and "recommends." Please note, it does not state "must" or "shall" or "required."

On Friday, July 9th at 1:55 pm, State Superintendent Dr. Ayala sent out an email in which she stated masks were required for individuals who were not fully vaccinated. Her email was in conflict with the CDC guidance.

On Saturday, July 10th at 2:39 pm, ISBE walked back her statement that mandated mask usage. ISBE indicated that it would follow the IDPH guidelines. The IDPH had adopted the CDC language that used the word "should."

On Tuesday, July 13th at 2:16 pm, ISBE's Weekly Message once again confirmed IDPH fully adopting updated CDC guidance for schools and highlighted a few key points from CDC regarding achieving high levels of COVID-19 vaccination among eligible students, having prevention strategies in place and if removing any to remove them one at a time along with monitoring closely, and the recommendation of masks and physical distancing as key prevention strategies.

It is important to note that we are literally a week away from the CDC announcement. I am committed to educating students supporting them socially and emotionally with the least amount of disruptions.

The district will post a Return to School Plan on the website. This plan will highlight COVID mitigation strategies and rules to be implemented but is always subject to change.