



**BACK TO SCHOOL UPDATE  
FROM SUPERINTENDENT HANKINS**

February 4, 2021

Dear parents, students, and the entire LKSD learning community,

Thank you very much for your continued patience and understanding as LKSD continues to do its best to balance health and safety concerns related to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic with the risk of returning to in-person instruction.

As we have communicated from the outset, our district relies on the best possible medical, scientific, and public health information and guidance from various sources, including the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), Yukon-Kuskokwim Health Corporation (YKHC), and the Alaska Smart Start 2020 Restart & Reentry Framework Guidance for K-12 Schools. Our goal has been, and continues to be, to provide the best possible education for students while balancing the health and safety of the entire school community.

The aim of this letter is to provide updates on the following very important subjects:

- In-Person Learning Decisions and Criteria
- COVID-19 Vaccination Efforts
- Virtual Learning Successes
- LKSD Support Network and Resources

**In-Person Learning Decisions & Criteria**

Unfortunately, the Y-K Delta currently has the highest COVID-19 infection rates in the entire state. In addition, the positivity rate in our region is 4-5x higher than that of surrounding areas, and much greater than the recommended 3% or less to indicate sufficient testing and tracing to reduce viral transmission. **As such, and in accordance with the January 13 guidance and recommendations from the Yukon-Kuskokwim Health Corporation (YKHC), we have made the difficult but necessary decision to continue with remote learning until health conditions improve.** Additional details regarding the January 13 advisory be found on the YKHC and LKSD websites – they are also attached to this letter.

These recommendations, which take into account guidance from the CDC and the Alaska Smart Start 2020 Restart & Reentry Framework Guidance for K-12 Schools, indicate that the Y-K Delta should satisfy the following criteria before schools return to modified in-person learning:

- 14-day average of new cases is less than 200 cases per 100,000 residents (equivalent to less than 25 cases per week);
- Positivity Rate is less than 3%, and
- All local cases can be linked to travel.

**The LKSD Board of Education will be meeting with YKHC, and Dr. Elizabeth Ohlsen, Staff Physician, Division of Public Health, on February 8<sup>th</sup> to take a closer look at regional data and discuss school risk-level recommendations.**

In the meantime, we must continue to follow public health guidance to limit the possibility of transmission within our communities. Continuing to heed this advice, along with increased vaccination, testing and tracing efforts, should lead to decreases in cases here in the Y-K Delta.

### COVID-19 Vaccination Efforts

Our district is working tirelessly to ensure that we are ready to safely bring our students back for in-person instruction as soon as health conditions allow. This includes advocating for school staff to be prioritized for vaccinations and working closely with YKHC to develop further mitigation strategies to get our children back to school faster.

As part of our efforts to protect our faculty, staff, students, and communities, I am pleased to report that many of our teachers and staff – myself included – have already received our first and second doses of the COVID-19 vaccine. Over the last few weeks, I've received vaccination photos from principals and staff and appreciate YKHC's continued effort to canvas our region with vaccine distribution. YKHC has visited all LKSD sites and will continue to do so in the coming weeks to ensure they get everyone eligible vaccinated as quickly as possible. And on January 19<sup>th</sup>, YKHC opened up eligibility for the vaccine to the general population including children ages 16 years and older (there is currently no vaccine approved for children ages 15 and younger). This is an important step to protect all community members and will help get our students back to the classroom safer and faster.

I remain very hopeful that, with continued mitigation strategies and ongoing vaccination efforts, we will be able to return students to school with all the necessary safety measures in place in the near future.

### Celebrating Virtual Learning Successes

While remote learning has certainly brought its own set of challenges, it has also created many opportunities for growth and connection.

Our teachers and staff have been working extremely hard to connect and engage with students, and they are adapting policies and approaches as best they can during these challenging times. This includes increasing support to students by:

- Providing one-on-one academic instruction
- Offering additional support hours daily for students who desire additional help
- Instituting regular and periodic check-ins with students and families
- Developing individual education plans to better accommodate student needs
- Allowing students more flexibility to complete their work
- Allowing an extended credit recovery period
- Offering virtual student activities and groups such as Battle of the Books, junior and senior high speech, spelling bee, and the Knowledge Bowl (new this year!)

We are also working with parents on additional accommodations to assist our students with remote learning and engagement. For these efforts to have the highest and best impact, we need your help to assist us in this process. I strongly encourage everyone to communicate frequently with your teachers, site administrators and the District with any support that you may need or ways to further connect with students so that we can continue to support academic growth at home.

Our teachers are using various methods and technologies to teach students including work packets, iPads and laptops that the school has provided to students, and the Intranet system. The District has made tremendous strides in connecting our students to remote learning through the Intranet system, which enables students to download and upload course content, access PowerSchool, participate in Zoom meetings, and send files to teachers from their homes. It also includes a program called Moodle that allows students to access classroom materials, lessons, homework and communicate with teachers. Our teachers have also been working extremely hard to create learning packets for students and connect with them over the phone or online to strengthen relationships, engagement and support.

As a result of our remote learning progress, the delivery of additional equipment to some LKSD families, and continued upgrades and enhancements to our technology and our platforms, our students and teachers are connecting with each other in exciting and meaningful ways. In this new and engaging format, students are able to Zoom with teachers and peers, share work, and make meaningful connections.

I am quite proud of the efforts that everyone has made to improving our remote learning experience and appreciate everyone's continued flexibility navigating the challenges. We have addressed the challenges experienced with the Intranet with GCI and they will be providing a dedicated technical team to assist with any Intranet issues moving forward – any issues should be reported immediately to LKSD so that they can be resolved quickly. The District has dedicated staff to help teachers and parents navigate the Intranet and content. The District, site administrators, staff

and teachers are working hard to meet the needs of students and their families, and we promise to continue to adapt and improve.

Please understand that the technical issues we experience related to the Intranet are short-term and will require continued patience and commitment of everyone – students, parents and teachers. We have already seen great rewards of those efforts in some villages. Together, we will overcome these challenges, and the long-term gains and rewards for our students will be well worth it even beyond these times. Our collective investment will enhance learning and provide yet another gateway to better prepare our students for the future.

### Support Network and Resources

Understanding the many challenges this school year presents to our families, we want to remind you of some of the various supports, resources, and services available to you and your student. They include:

- **School Resources:** Back to School information, resources, and support are available on our [website](#), and with your local sites, and can be reached at (907) 543-4800.
- **Behavioral Health:** Social workers are available to assist with social and emotional support. Please reach out to your school to be connected to your site social worker or to the LKSD social worker department, at 907-545-4429.
- **LKSD & GCI Intranet Support:** For Intranet support, please contact LKSD's dedicated Intranet support team, Tim Heakin (907) 543-4800 and/or Brent Beans (907) 543-4933. Tim and Brent will listen to the concern and route the call to the correct teammate, or to GCI if necessary, to assist with a solution.
- **YKHC's COVID-19 information** (including vaccinations) hotline can be reached at 907-543-6949.
- **LKSD Live:** In early December, LKSD spearheaded "LKSD Live," a regular Facebook Live Zoom on Friday afternoons featuring guest interviews moderated by Patrick Williams, LKSD Education Specialist. The goal of these sessions is to connect people from around our school district by discussing themes in education. Past topics have included student resilience and growth mindset, literacy in the home, and teaching current events. Please check the LKSD webpage for links to previous episodes and more information on upcoming episodes.

Please know that we are actively working with our teachers to plan for a physical return in a for all students as soon as it is safe to do so. As a parent of two LKSD students as well as an educator and administrator, I can certainly understand and relate to the struggles and challenges that we all have been experiencing. I cannot promise that we won't encounter a few more challenges in navigating this new year, but I do promise to continue advocating for our students and families to be centered in our decision-making as we go. ***We're all in this together, even while apart.***

This is a particularly difficult time for our entire community, and I am grateful for your continued partnership and efforts in ensuring a successful, and healthy, school year for our students.

Sincerely,



**Kimberly Hankins**  
Superintendent

# CORONAVIRUS – COVID19

YKHC OFFICIAL ADVISORY — JANUARY 13, 2021

## Formal Recommendations for School Districts

Understanding the critical importance of essential community functions, like education, continue amidst the on-going COVID-19 health crisis, YKHC developed the following guidance to clarify our remote learning recommendations, and to help teachers and school administrators with long-term planning based on COVID-19 rates and projections.

YKHC relies on several tools to determine the risk associated with in-person learning. It is our belief that **during a global pandemic there is no low-risk** associated with schools having in-person learning in the YK Delta.

Our region's vulnerability to COVID-19 is significantly higher than many places in the state due to a number of factors such as transportation challenges, limited healthcare infrastructure, lack of widespread access to running water and sewer, and multi-generational housing.

YKHC has put the following framework together to help identify when it would be safe to move back to medium risk, and allow for modified in-person learning to occur.

These recommendations are based on the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention School Risk Indicator Threshold and the Alaska Smart Start 2020 Restart & Reentry Framework Guidance for K-12 Schools.

### **Comprehensive considerations for evaluating modified in-person learning must include:**

- YK Delta Case 14-day Rate < 200 per 100,000 (<25 cases/week),
- YK Delta Positivity Rate < 3%, and
- All local cases can be linked to travel

### **YK Delta Case 14-day Rate**

Because of the interconnected nature of the YK Delta, YKHC believes all schools should be in remote learning status when the total number of new cases exceeds the CDC's highest risk of transmission category for schools.

This rate is a 14-day average of 200 per 100,000, which equates to roughly 25 cases per week in the YK Delta. When numbers are below this threshold, it may be

Even with no active cases in the YK Delta, we would continue to recommend all schools operate in medium risk status until we see cases drop across the U.S.

In November 2020, YKHC recommended all schools in the region move from medium to high-risk status, and close to in-person learning. Community-based transmission of COVID-19 continues occurring widely in Bethel and multiple villages throughout the YK Delta, and there was significant evidence in late 2020 that undetected transmission was occurring in villages prior to a confirmed case due to the interconnectedness of the entire region.

safe for select schools to move to medium risk status, provided they meet the other two indicators.

### **Positivity Rate**

YKHC also looks at the percentage of coronavirus tests performed that have a positive result, known as a "positivity rate." This helps us know if the numbers are low because of a reduction in coronavirus transmission or if it is because not enough people were tested. We calculate the positivity rate by taking the total number of positive tests divided by the total number of tests.

A positivity rate below 3 percent generally indicates that we are doing enough testing to identify everyone infected so they can isolate themselves, their close contacts can quarantine, and we are more confident in reduced viral transmission.

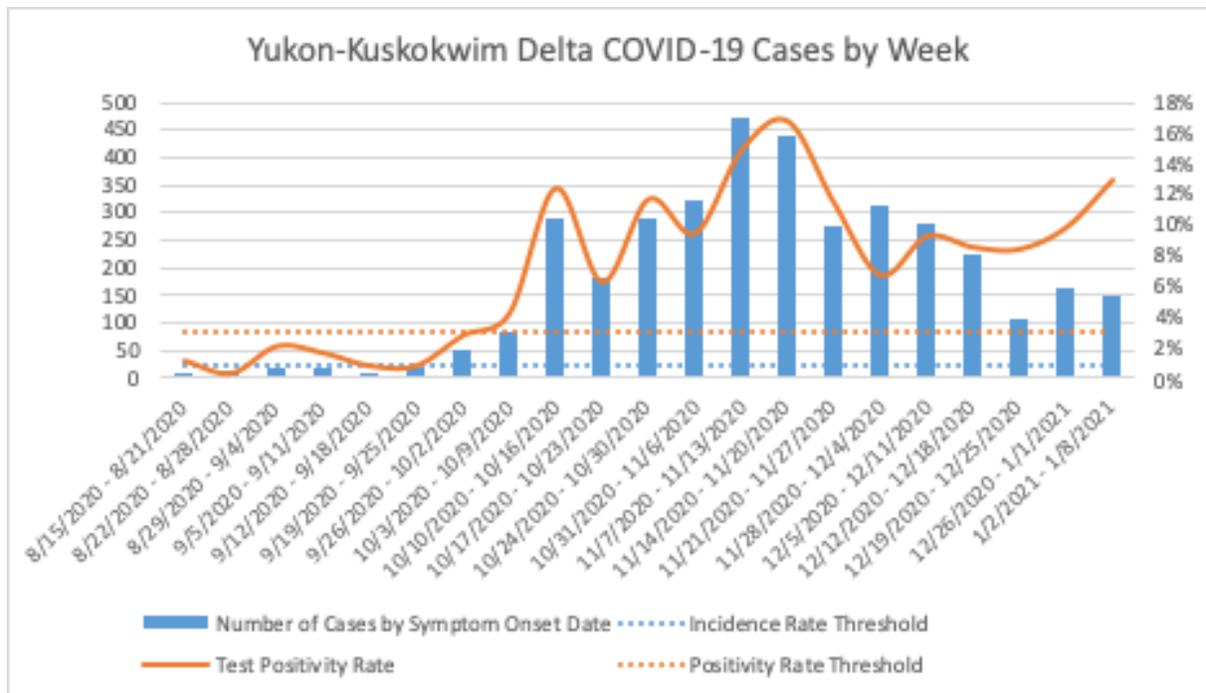
Without enough testing, the virus can quietly spread, leading to large village outbreaks that are difficult to control. (see graph, next page)

# CORONAVIRUS – COVID19

## Contact Tracing of Local Cases Linked to Travel

Finally, in addition to regional rates falling below these thresholds, each individual community should go two weeks without any cases that cannot clearly be linked to travel. Even one case in a community would indicate a case rate that would exceed the highest risk thresholds set by the CDC.

An excellent way to lower the rates, and support essential functions like modified in-person learning, would be to have every eligible person in a community be vaccinated, wear a mask when out in public, and limit in-person social interactions to just the individuals who reside in your household. Please help us spread the word about the importance of vaccination to get kids back in school as quickly as possible.



The graph above shows the number of cases (in blue) by week since school started in August. In order to protect the life, health, and safety of students, teachers, and communities, YKHC would like this number to fall below the blue dashed line for two weeks before any school returns to medium risk in-person learning. The orange line represents the test positivity rate by week over the same period. We would also like that to be below 3 percent for two weeks as represented by the orange dashed line.

We hope this guidance will help districts, schools, and teachers anticipate the types of recommendations that have been and will continue to come from YKHC over the coming weeks and months, and assist with longer term planning.