



## BACK TO SCHOOL UPDATE – MITIGATION STRATEGIES FROM SUPERINTENDENT HANKINS

February 26, 2021

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

As promised, I am following up on my message sent last week to provide you with more details on how we plan to move forward in the coming weeks to bring our students back to school safely.

Currently, the community transmission of COVID-19 levels in the Yukon Kuskokwim Delta are high (red). Based on these conditions under the new guidance from the Yukon Kuskokwim Health Center (YKHC), the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), LKSD is implementing the following plan:

- **Pre-K through 6<sup>th</sup> grade:** will be allowed to open in hybrid mode utilizing strict multi-layered mitigation strategies; and
- **Grades 7-12:** will remain remote-only until community transmission decreases to the orange (substantial transmission) category. However, we are working with individual sites to bring in small groups of high needs students within this group level.

The conditions in each of our 29 schools are unique. Many of our schools have already reached out to families about their preferred learning option – in-person hybrid or remote-only and will resume instruction in-person as early as next week. Each of the schools re-opening plans and dates will be released directly by the site administrators of each school directly to families. Please contact your site administrator directly with any questions.

Thanks to everyone's widespread mitigation efforts, including getting vaccinated, masking, social distancing and handwashing, our case rates have continued to drop in recent weeks – our region no longer has the highest COVID-19 case rate in Alaska. It's important that we all keep following public health guidance so that we can continue this downward trend and get more of our students back to classes as soon as possible.

### **Multi-Layered Mitigation Strategies**

As we reopen, each school will implement the following strict protocols and mitigation strategies to protect the health and safety of our students, staff, and families. Specific details regarding these protocols will be provided in each COVID-19 Site Specific Plan:

#### **Screening & Testing**

- **Monitoring:** All students and staff will be asked to self-monitor for symptoms of COVID-19. If they are feeling sick or experiencing symptoms of the virus, they should act immediately and stay home from school; consult a healthcare professional; call YKHC to schedule diagnostic testing; and notify the school office.
- **Screening / Surveillance Testing:** In conjunction with YKHC, we are pleased to introduce COVID-19 screening testing using BINAX cards. The District has already applied and received approval for all 29 schools to utilize this testing and will be working closely with YKHC and community health aides to assist in implementation. Screening testing is intended to identify infected asymptomatic individuals who may be contagious so that measures can be taken to prevent further transmission. This testing is an important tool to help prevent big outbreaks and keep our schools open. YKHC is encouraging schools to conduct screening tests at least once a week. Testing will be done on-site – it is optional and requires parent permission but strongly encouraged. Additional information regarding this testing can be found [here](#).

#### **Masks, Physical Distancing & Cleaning**

- **Masks and face shields:** Proper masking is critical to the success and safety of re-opening schools. All students and staff members will be required to properly wear masks or face coverings when on school property. Based on public health guidance, the most effective masks are surgical masks or triple layered cloth masks. All teachers and staff will be provided with surgical masks. In addition, face shields will also be available to teachers and staff. Additional masks are also available to students in the event that they do not have one or require a more effective mask.

- **Physical distancing:** Social distancing strategies will be implemented in the classroom setting as well as for movement throughout the school and on buses to promote healthy behaviors, environments and operations and to reduce the risk and spread of COVID-19. Cohorts and staggered scheduling will also help to maximize social distancing and health and safety in our buildings and limit mixing between groups.
- **Cleaning and ventilation:** Cleaning and disinfecting protocols will be intensified. The district has also purchased electrostatic cleaners for each school. Electrostatic cleaners are an effective and efficient way to disinfect all surfaces and hard-to-reach places that may have been missed. Our air ventilation and circulation systems adhere to the most recent CDC guidance to increase the delivery of clean air and dilute potential contaminants in the school.

### **Preparation and Planning for In-Person Classes**

We must all do our part. Our continued collaboration will be critical as our schools reopen, and we ask that our community assist with the following:

- **Help prepare children for in-person classes:** Please help our students adjust quickly to safety protocols by encouraging and practicing with them at home, especially with proper masking, social distancing and washing / sanitizing hands. I have included a Checklist: Planning for In-Person Classes and information on proper masking based on guidance from the CDC to help with preparations. It is intended to help parents, guardians, caregivers, plan and prepare for in-person classes. Even if your child resumes in-person learning at school, it is important to prepare for the possibility of remote-only learning if school closes or if your child becomes exposed to COVID-19 and needs to stay home.
- **Continued mitigation:** Please continue to follow public health guidance to protect yourself and others including wearing a mask in public settings, washing your hands with soap often, keeping social distance, and limiting your interactions with people outside your immediate household, clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces, monitor daily for potential symptoms and consider improving ventilation in your home – as we are doing in schools. Improving ventilation (air flow) can help prevent virus particles from accumulating in the air in your home and the CDC formally recommended this in their guidance last month and provided [suggestions](#).
- **COVID-19 vaccination:** Vaccinations have been an incredibly powerful tool for preventing COVID-19 infections and protecting the community. It has been integral to bringing our case levels down. If you or a loved one wishes to be vaccinated, we encourage you to please call YKHC at (907) 543-6949 or submit a vaccine application online at <https://tinyurl.com/y7reeyst>. Please contact them if you have any questions or concerns about the safety and efficacy of the vaccine. The CDC has provided common questions people may have about the vaccine [here](#).

This public health crisis continues to be dynamic and we are committed to continuing to monitor the ever-changing guidance and making the necessary adjustments to our re-opening plan. The District and sites will continue to update parents and communities as we move forward.

Thank you for your continued patience and support.

Sincerely,



**Kimberly Hankins**  
Superintendent