

Transcript of Dr. Baele's audio message for the time between Thanksgiving and Winter Breaks.

Hello Oak Grove Families, Community Members, Staff and others who may be listening. The date is November 19th and as I create this audiocast, I am concerned about the direction the community, county, state, and nation are going regarding the COVID 19 global pandemic. Yes, we have much to be proud of within the Oak Grove School District such as dedicated students, parents, and staff who tirelessly follow the guidelines presented by the IDPH, Peoria County Health Department, and the Governor's office. It seems, though, this is not enough, as cases continue to rise. As you listen today, I just want to provide some information as we head into the Holiday season and what the plan is for Oak Grove School District #68 over the next 4 weeks.

At last night's Board of Education meeting, much discussion centered around keeping our school open between Thanksgiving Break and Winter Break. These three weeks are critical to student learning and we absolutely need to be in-person to provide each student the maximum benefit. It was the agreement of all that we would continue to provide in-person learning for the weeks between the Thanksgiving and Winter breaks. Parents that feel uncomfortable with this decision can let the office know and select remote learning for the remainder of the second quarter. With this being said, we understand that the decision to go remote may come from the Governor's office at any time. If such an order is given, our district would comply. Until then it is all of our responsibility to keep our students coming to school safely. This means that we must do the following:

The first step is completing self-certification. In an effort to provide a simpler solution to self certification through lanyards, we have found that they are being lost or not being worn. The administration and staff need your continued commitment in assessing your student every morning and verifying that they are symptom and fever free when they come to school. You do that by having students wear their lanyard. This helps the administration and staff because you may have one to five children to check each morning whereas, the staff have over 170 students to check before they come through the doors on any given day. Your certification lanyard is important to us and the process. Starting after Thanksgiving break, there will be a 2.00 fee for any student needing a replacement lanyard and badge holder.

Next, as stated in Version 4 of the Return to School plan document, those families that are planning to vacation any time over Thanksgiving break should voluntarily quarantine upon their return. Visiting with people in a different state without social distancing, mask wearing, or other necessary mitigations increases the likelihood of community spread when returning, which would add to the rising numbers in Peoria County. For the health and safety of those that want to continue in person learning, please keep the office informed of your decision to self-quarantine if you travel over the Thanksgiving break.

Here is a key point for those not traveling...let's talk about time students are spending together outside of the school environment such as sleepovers, kids hanging out after school, and time with family friends outside of school. Although we have been extremely successful here at school in controlling the spread of the coronavirus, once your students spend time with a group of friends outside of school, at a sleepover, or at a friend gathering without the same mitigation, our efforts at school become diminished. I understand that our children are social and want to spend time with one another but spending time together without precautions may actually force the school district to

go remote due to contact tracing events that take place outside of school. By going remote, this would eliminate their time together at school which in turn diminishes social time. We need your assistance to limit contact through sleepovers, small gatherings, and family or friend gatherings where mitigation is not being practiced. We do appreciate your support.

Further, all families that are not currently remote should be developing their backup plans for childcare. Given the uncertainty of another Stay at Home proclamation date, it is very important that you are ready for the immediate call for all students to begin remote learning. Other school districts have faced substitute and staffing shortages that force the need to go to remote. It is not the administration's plan to go remote, but we must be ready in the event that 1 - The Governor states that we must go remote through a stay at home order...2 - We have more students out of school than attending school due positive tests or close contact tracing requiring quarantine or isolation...3 - We can no longer staff classrooms due to staff positives or close contact exposure requiring quarantine or isolation...4 - The Peoria County Health Department requires the local closure of our school building due to any of the mentioned scenarios. We do have options prior to going fully remote, these include exhausting all substitutes and administrative coverage of classes, sending one or two classrooms that may be adversely impacted to remote, and quickly reacting to students that may show signs and symptoms in order to protect the Oak Grove learning environment.

As we come upon Thanksgiving break, I urge and advocate to each and every citizen in our community to wear your mask, socially distance, wash your hands frequently and consider an alternative to family gatherings. I know that we miss our extended families and friends but as cases and deaths continue to increase, so to the chances of becoming a positive case yourself if you do not mitigate. Be "all in" so your student or students can continue to come to school in-person. The Board of Education, teachers, staff, and administration are all committed to in-person learning as long as the guidelines and coverage of staff allow. Please consider these points as you develop your plans for the next few weeks. The Board of Education and administration will discuss options for learning after Winter break at the December Board of Education meeting.

The collective work of students, parents, staff, administration, and the Board has led us to 14 weeks of in-person learning and I believe that we can do many more if we all make the difficult decisions needed to slow the spread. Do it for your students, teachers, and larger community. Remember everyday we are learning is a great day to be an Eagle.

If you should have any questions or comments don't hesitate to contact me.

Thank you for your time and have a Happy Thanksgiving next week!

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