



## Implementing an All-Day, In-Person Instructional Model: Getting to “all-in” with a Remote Option January, 2021

### **Background**

The Orange City School District had been implementing a full remote instructional model from the onset of 2020-2021. From November 2nd to November 20th, the District implemented a hybrid model, with students who elected in-person learning returning to campus for a three week period before returning to full remote learning in response to public health implications of the COVID-19 pandemic. With drastic spikes in cases and new cases per capita (new cases per 100,000) countywide, including the primary zip codes served by the District, the Cuyahoga County Board of Health (CCBH) issued a Stay at Home Advisory urging travel for essential needs only. At the time of the advisory, the District was facing a real challenge of properly staffing the buildings at a capacity to deliver quality face-to-face instruction while maintaining physical distance in the classrooms of at least six feet between students. These factors, along with predicted complications related to holiday gatherings from Thanksgiving through New Years Day, coupled with the CCBH announcement to possibly expect upward of 2,000 new cases daily, led to the decision to remain remote through January 11th, 2021. The District proceeded to implement full remote learning through the winter holidays, resuming in-person hybrid learning on Monday, January 11, 2021. As of January 29th, the District is in day 14 of its return to the hybrid model. Back in December, it was communicated to families that the plan is to implement an all-day option for all students with a full remote option during or before the fourth quarter.

### **Considerations**

#### **Case Discussion**

It is the common goal to get all children back into the classroom for all day in-person instruction as soon as possible, but only if we can do so safely. Determining when it is safe to return is not a simple task, but we are learning more every day about the virus and its impact on schools and the greater community. While some districts around us remained in, some all-in, and they are citing no major classroom based outbreaks, we now have our own information. Over the three weeks we were in back in November, we had five student cases and five classroom teacher cases (six if you count a 1-day substitute), none of which were linked back to close contact in school. In the two following weeks after returning to full remote (through December 6th), we had two more classroom teacher cases and five more student cases. None of these cases traced back to close contact in the classroom. Whether in or out, case numbers were consistent and there were no classroom-related outbreaks. This was a good sign that our mitigation strategies are working, increasing confidence in resuming in-person learning, which we did on January 11th. We have continued to watch student and teacher case counts. From December 6th through January 8th, there were five positive teacher cases and eight student cases, again, relatively consistent with the case counts from when we were in-person. Now that we have resumed in-person learning from January 11th through January 29th (14 school days), there have been one positive teacher case and two positive student cases on campus, and there were four remote student cases reported.

#### **Hybrid Implementation**

Indeed, county and local zip code numbers at the end of the semester were trending in the wrong direction to consider a full return; however, there was enough confidence in our hybrid model to implement it as stated above. Nevertheless, this was trying at times. In November when the threat of reaching Level 4 was looming and the CCBH released predictions of 2,000 cases per day, even families who believed in the safety of the hybrid in-person model began to question their decision to send children in-person, evidenced by a drop from 70% of parents opting for in-person learning to 60% at MHS and BMS, and to below 50% at OHS. This put a strain on the staffing for remote students, resulting in more teacher changes for students in grades K-3. Whether hybrid or all-in, staffing will continue to be a challenge day-to-day as long as community spread is high.

#### **All-Day, In-Person Implementation**

While we will continue offering the full remote option, a transition to all-day, in-person learning is desired. The mid-year registration update and survey revealed that overall, 72% of respondents expressed interest in an all-day model (MHS = 75%, BMS = 74% & OHS = 64%). This is reflective of responses for over 90% of our students. Also, we have data from the three-week in-person period in November, as well as numbers from our

current hybrid implementation to justify moving forward. Furthermore, we will continue to implement the five core mitigation strategies per CDC recommendations (Table 1) as well as additional mitigation strategies (Table 2) to prevent the spread of the virus, keeping students and staff as safe as possible. The key consideration when it comes to all-day, in-person instruction is moving from six feet of distancing between students in classrooms to less than six feet. Our goal is to maintain at least three feet of social distance in classrooms and cafeterias, but this will be dependent on enrollment in each setting. Students will be spaced as far as possible. However, plastic dividers will be utilized in **ALL** classroom and cafeteria settings. The in-person hybrid model used cohorting to reduce the number of students on campus on a given day to half, but an all-day model will bring all in-person students into the buildings at the same time instead of in cohorts. **Likewise, increased ridership on buses must be noted as an expected area of close contact due to finite space.**

We know that when one mitigation is removed or lessened, another strategy (or other strategies) should be added when possible. With the given mitigation strategies already in place, and considering the additional strategies (Table 2), the reality of implementing the all-day, all-in model is possible. It is also promising that schools who have been in-person longer than us have not had classroom-based outbreaks either. Of course, community conditions and logistics related to COVID-19 may still impact our model. When in-person, it may become necessary to move between in-person or full remote learning, increase student quarantines due to contact tracing, and potentially issue short notice grade level or building level closures, but the goal is to safely operate all-in. Also, if the Ohio Public Advisory System elevates to Level 4, the District will return to full remote learning during that period.

### Timeframe

Data trends for Cuyahoga County as well as our local zip codes seems to have reached a plateau. In fact, on January 22, 2021, the Cuyahoga County Board of Health (CCBH), for the first time since the onset of the pandemic, released a statement in support of in-person five day schooling. As we prepare to reduce social distance in classrooms to less than six feet, we have continued planning for the transition. While case counts continue to rise across the state, county and in our zip codes, we are seeing a pattern of declining rates of increase. In fact, the rate of weekly increase in our primary zip codes on January 15th and January 22nd were 6.74% and 6.42%, respectively (this reached an all-time high of 22.7% on December 4th. Knowing this, coupled with the promise of vaccination\*\* for those most vulnerable in the community as well as school employees, we can be prepared to implement an all-day, all-in model. **We tentatively plan to transition to the all-day model the week of March 1, 2021.** In the meantime, families who are not comfortable with an all-day model can continue with a full remote option if they so choose.

### Mitigation Strategies

**Table 1**

CDC Key Mitigation Strategy	Hybrid In-Person	All In-Person
Consistent and correct use of masks		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The district has implemented a mandatory mask policy for all students and staff</li> </ul>	
Social distancing to the largest extent possible		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 6' social distance in classrooms</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Less than 6' social distance in most classrooms and cafeterias (our goal is to maintain at least 3' whenever possible, but dividers will be used in <b>all</b> classroom and cafeteria settings)</li> </ul>
Hand hygiene and masks		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hand sanitizer dispensers have been installed throughout buildings and on buses</li> <li>• Hand sanitizer is available in every classroom</li> <li>• Signage has been added in buildings building indicating masks are required</li> </ul>	
Cleaning and disinfection		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Classroom desks and chairs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Same cleaning protocol followed</li> </ul>

	sanitized between A.M. and P.M. sessions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High touch surfaces (doorknobs, bathrooms) sanitized throughout the day</li> <li>• Nightly cleaning of each classroom after students leave</li> <li>• Clorox 360 machine</li> <li>• Bus seats disinfected after each route as well as at the end of the day</li> <li>• Each bus receives deep cleaning/sanitizing daily</li> </ul>	as when hybrid EXCEPT for the mid-day cleaning that occurred in classrooms between A.M. and P.M. sessions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Paper placemats will also be provided for teachers to use on desktops, changing between students</li> </ul> (*revised February, 2020)
Contact tracing in collaboration with local health department	✓	✓
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The district works closely with CCBH to conduct contact tracing per CCBH guidelines</li> </ul>	

**Table 2**

Additional Mitigation Strategies	Hybrid In-Person	All In-Person
Indoor Air Quality (IAQ)	✓	✓
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• OCSD has systems controlling fresh air intake and quality air filtration (MERV 8+)</li> </ul>	
Indoor Air Quality (IAQ)	✓ (as of January)	✓
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• OCSD installation of REME-Halo UV &amp; Ionization to HVAC Units</li> </ul>	
Dividers for Staff Confering	✓	✓
Dividers for Students	✗ (on-site, in-progress)	✓
Distancing on Buses	✗*	✗*
Ongoing COVID-19 Testing of students and staff	✗***	✗***

- We have already added plastic dividers for teachers to use when conferring with students or for putting between students who must have a brief collaboration or who must confer with the teacher at the same time. Looking ahead to all-day in-person learning, bringing students closer together would justify purchasing dividers for student tables/desks, mitigating direct contact and curbing direct exchange of small droplets or exhaled vapor that escapes their masks.
- We have already adjusted fresh air intake using our controls installed via an energy project completed a few years back, and we currently have MERV 8 or higher filtration which is regularly maintained. The all day in-person model will introduce more people into the environment with the elimination of cohorting, so the District has added an Indoor Air Quality (IAQ) mitigation system, REME-HALO, which mitigates bacteria and viruses using UV light and ionization to kill contaminants in the air and on surfaces, This will prove beneficial beyond COVID-19 as influenza and other bugs are also mitigated. Indoor Air Quality systems have been implemented by Warrensville Heights, Hawken, Gilmour, Shaker Height and Rocky River to my knowledge.
- Vaccination Phase 1B for vulnerable community members and school employees is set to begin in February.
- Regular testing of students and staff, if/when available, should be sought. This approach, especially as treatment options become more readily available along with vaccination, would support medical mitigation.

\*Distancing on school buses, as shared back in the fall, is not able to be maintained as space is finite and ridership is not something we can control. Masking and seating charts, with as little seat sharing as possible, will be maintained.

\*\*Vaccination of vulnerable adults in the community and school employees in Phase 1B of the state's vaccination plan is set to be underway in the month of February.

\*\*\*Both, the pilot study cited by the Ohio Department of Health when changes to quarantine guidance and the study cited in the January 26th CDC statement about returning to in-person schooling, cite ongoing testing as a key mitigation strategy, but availability to schools is largely not possible.