

Illinois School for the Deaf  
125 S Webster Ave. | Jacksonville, Illinois 62650

## Letter from the Desk of the Superintendent

2/12/2021

Dear Parents and Guardians of ISD students,

Thank you for your ongoing feedback, engagement, and flexibility over this last challenging year. While we are happy to hear how well families are adapting to remote learning, we know many of our teachers and students are eager to safely return to campus. I am writing to update you on our plans for returning to in-person learning and to request your input regarding plans for your student.

### *Update on Return to School*

After the fall surge in cases, we are pleased that there may be some hope on the horizon. Case rates are trending downward in Illinois and Phase 1B of vaccinations is currently underway, to include DRS school staff. We have also observed best practices on how to make schools as safe as possible. And there is a federal commitment to re-opening schools as quickly and safely as possible.

Based on these encouraging trends, we are currently planning for **students to return for in-person learning starting April 6** (residential students will return April 5<sup>th</sup>) through the remainder of the 2020-2021 school year. Of course, while we have every expectation that this will happen, we will continue to closely monitor virus-related issues that may impact the return to in-person learning. Also, please note that students can continue distance learning if that's the best option for your family.

To guide our planning, we are actively engaging school nurses and teachers as well as infection control specialists, parents, and local health departments. We are also seeking guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Illinois Department of Public Health, Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) and our sister schools who have already brought students back into the classroom.

Using this information, we are developing a plan that includes:

- **Vaccinations** for staff prior to starting school.
- **COVID Testing** for school staff and students on a regular basis.



JB Pritzker, Governor

Grace Hou, Secretary

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- **Social Distancing and Safety:**
  - Re-configuring classrooms, offices, dormitories, dining, and other common areas;
  - Enhancing hygiene and cleaning practices;
  - Securing and requiring the necessary PPE; and
  - Revisiting policies and procedures related to school events, transportation, visitors.
- **Continuous Monitoring** of relevant data to guide our planning.
- **Limiting Exposure** by creating “cohorts” or small learning groups of students.
- **Infection Control**, including policies and procedures for symptom self-assessment, isolating and quarantining, and contact tracing.
- **Accountability** for students and parents including a signed Code of Conduct requiring adherence to all COVID-related policies and procedures.

### ***We Need Your Feedback***

To further guide planning and staffing, we ask that you complete the survey (link is at the end of the letter) by 2/19/2021 regarding whether and how you would like your student to return to campus. In addition, please be on the lookout for additional information and opportunities to provide feedback coming soon.

We look forward to sharing additional details as they become available and partnering with you to best meet your students’ needs. Please let me know if you have any questions. Thank you again for all you do.

[https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSfKOBaomQ7Q5YKXxBzzCy0zyHfCH2httHA9Wq1JlgWmYlAZIg/viewform?usp=sf\\_link](https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSfKOBaomQ7Q5YKXxBzzCy0zyHfCH2httHA9Wq1JlgWmYlAZIg/viewform?usp=sf_link)

Sincerely,

Julee M. Nist, M.Ed., Ed.S.  
ISD Superintendent