

Gibraltar School District

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Dear GSD Families and Staff,

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Last week the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS) listed several GSD school buildings as COVID-19 outbreaks. It came as quite a shock because the Wayne County Health Department had not informed us of this status change for two of our three buildings listed. Up until that point, we were under the impression that when cases in a building were unlinked and there was very strong evidence that transmission occurred off school grounds, that this would not be considered an outbreak. In general, our positive cases have been traced to gatherings, parties, travel sports teams, visits with individual family members who also tested positive, so needless to say, I was not expecting to have our schools labeled as an outbreak site.

I want to acknowledge that the term "outbreak" can be a scary and unsettling word, but we have learned that the term "outbreak" has a slightly different definition according to MDHHS in terms of how they report cases in schools. Since last Monday, I have spent time talking with the WCHD to understand how schools will be determined as "outbreak" sites. To develop shared understanding, I have created an FAQ to help explain the differences between how the district reports positive COVID-19 cases versus what is required for the WCHD to report to the state health department (MDHHS) for its newly created reporting website.

Moving forward, we will remain engaged in collaborative and positive discussions with the WCHD so we have a shared understanding of how each building is progressing as we continue to navigate this new normal.

Michigan Department of Health and Human Services COVID-19 Outbreak List, FAQ

How do the district's positive cases get reported to the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS)?

When the district is notified that it has a positive case, the district immediately starts to contact trace and works with the WCHD to determine next steps including verification of positive results. The district then is required to fill out a form about the positive case and email it to WCHD. The WCHD then tabulates the number of cases per building and reports any school that has more than one positive case to the MDHHS. The MDHHS then identifies any school buildings that have more than one case and labels that school as an "outbreak" site on their website.

WCHD is responsible for reporting this weekly to the MDHHS and is to contact the district each week to verify the buildings with more than one positive case that they will be reporting to MDHHS. It is important to note that the weekly contact from WCHD to verify the number(s) has yet to happen.

How does a school receive the label outbreak on the MDHHS website?

If a school is identified as having more than one positive case among a student or staff member from that school, it is placed on the MDHHS "outbreak" list.

How does WCHD and MDHHS define an outbreak?

WCHD and MDHHS define an outbreak as two lab confirmed tests in one building. It does NOT matter if the two lab confirmed positive cases have shared exposure or not. This means that it will be considered an "outbreak" even if the exposure is unlinked to school and there is very strong evidence that transmission occurred off school grounds. For example, if one individual in a school building become positive due to a member in their household being positive and a different individual in that same building tests positive due to attending an event off school grounds, those two cases will be considered an "outbreak" and will be reported that way to the MDHHS and posted on their website as a "new outbreak", regardless if there was not shared exposure at school.

It is important to note that it does state on the MDHHS website in paragraph three, "*students or staff who were exposed to COVID-19 outside of school grounds AND are not thought to have spread the disease on the school grounds (due to quarantine, self-isolation, etc.) are not included in the tables below.*" At this point, GSD has not

experienced this to be accurate with the reporting on the MDHSS website and we continue to see any positive case over one in a building being reported as an outbreak.

How long does a school stay on the MDHHS outbreak list?

A school is placed on the MDHHS outbreak list for 28 days. If the school has another positive case during that 28 days, the 28 day count starts over and the school is moved back up to “new outbreak”. This, again, is regardless of the new positive case being connected to another positive case in the school or not.

Additionally, due to the way that MDHHS is requiring reporting, I expect that most if not all of our buildings will eventually be listed on this website and will more than likely stay on this list for the months to come.

What is the difference between the label “New School Outbreaks” vs. “Ongoing School Outbreaks”?

When a school is placed on the “new school outbreaks” list it is recently added to the MDHSS outbreak list and is considered new because it is the first time it has had more than one case at that school building. Since the school must stay on the list for 28 days, it is then moved down to “ongoing school outbreak” to serve out the 28 days on the website.

If a school is listed as an outbreak, does it have to be closed?

No, if a school is listed on the MDHHS website, it does NOT mean it must close. For clarification, the decision to close a building due to an outbreak is based on many factors, including contact tracing, verifying the source of an outbreak, and determining the amount of individuals who could be infected. There is not a set number for what will close a building down for 14 days and there are many factors that go into this very thorough process.

Through the two-week Chapman Elementary closing, we have seen the swift action the district is willing to take when contact tracing cannot rule out the possibility of in-school spread. We will continue to vigorously monitor all positive cases and please know that if we are unable to verify the source(s), we will work with WCHD to help us to determine the next steps, which could mean closure of a building for 14 days, quarantining a classroom, sports team, or participants in an extra-curricular activity, to name a few.

Why does the number of positive cases on the GSD Dashboard not match the number of positive cases on the MDHHS website?

The WCHD is only required to report to MDHHS if there is more than one positive case in a school building. The district reports all current positive cases, therefore, the numbers reported by MDHHS versus the district will always be different. For the most current and up to date information, please refer to the District COVID-19 dashboard. If you have further questions, please contact your child’s principal.

Thank you for taking the time to read all my long emails lately. There is just so much information to share as things are constantly changing. I appreciate all of your support during this challenging time and know that together we will get through this!

Your Partner in Education,
Amy Conway