

H1N1 Update October 28, 2009

As the news continues to report the spread of H1N1 and the closing of schools in our area you may wonder why some schools close and some don't or you may be concerned with what our school is doing to keep students and staff as safe as possible.

The determination as to whether we close school or not is a local decision each school district makes. The health department has sent out guidelines but the decision is left up to each school district. With that said, our decision is dependent on a number of variables. The following will explain what our daily student attendance rate tells us and how we are making a decision to either remain open or close school.

- Statistically our normal attendance rate is between 93% and 94%. Some days a little higher and some days a little lower. Prior to the recent concern most students who were ill stayed home a day or two. Many times when we sent a child home ill, it was a 24-hour bug and the child was back in school the next day.
- This year the recommendation is to make sure when a student is ill that the student stays home for a longer length of time, 4 to 5 days or longer.
- The first two bullet points illustrate that just the fact that students are being kept home twice as long or longer, would in itself make our attendance rate decrease. For example, our normal attendance rate of 93% would decrease to 86% just by the same number of students becoming ill but staying home twice as long. An 86% attendance rate doesn't show that we are experiencing an increase in sickness. Our records show that students are being kept home longer for an illness. (This is a health department recommendation so it is a good thing)
- As our attendance rate declines from 86% it does show more students not attending due to illness. A few percentage points would not show a huge problem, but where does a district draw a line?
- We have been monitoring our daily attendance very closely. Last week our district attendance rate was as low as 82% with the high school having the lowest attendance rate. Today, Wednesday October 28th our district rate is back up to 89% with the high school rate at 91%. As of today we seem to be rebounding a bit. There are three scenarios that will cause us to close school:
 - The district attendance rate at 80% or lower
 - A huge or significant spike in the number of student absent, even if the overall attendance rate is above 80%
 - The health department reports a warning to close school

We have not had a spike in absences, our attendance rate has been a gradual up or down move. We will continue to monitor the situation very close and stay in contact with the county health department.

I do need to give credit to our staff and our parents in their efforts that has assisted in preventing an out break from happening. The staff is very focused on disinfecting. The custodians have changed their cleaning procedure to include more disinfecting and bus drivers disinfect their buses. The teaching staff, para-professionals and principals are constantly reminding all students to sanitize their hands. We have installed hand sanitizers in classrooms and cafeterias.

Parents have been very cooperative to keep their children home for the longer length of time even though it creates a hardship for them.

There is one fallacy the media is portraying. The purpose of closing school is to give the virus and illnesses a minimum of a four day window to run its course and not have students confined in a building and pass the illnesses back and forth. The main reason for the school closing is not to give schools extra time to clean the buildings. Disinfecting has to take place every day. It is not something your can catch up on when shut down.

Even though I am proud of the efforts of our staff and community and think that may have helped prevent a rapid spread of illness, I would be irresponsible to imply we can prevent a wide-spread outbreak. We could go the entire year without a problem or I could be calling school off tomorrow.

I hope this helps inform you as to what we are doing and why.

As a reminder, H1N1 immunization clinics will be held by the health department at the following dates, times and locations:

Nov. 4 th	1 PM to 7 PM	at Harrison High School
Nov. 5 th	1 PM to 7 PM	at Clare High School
Nov. 18 th	1 PM to 7 PM	at Farwell High School