



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Education Unified Command develops recommendation tool for Smart and Safe School Reopening Guidance

LAWRENCE – As part of Education Unified Command response, Lawrence-Douglas County Public Health has developed the following [COVID-19 Smart and Safe School Reopening Guidance](#) to assist K-12 school districts and families in decision-making for the upcoming school year.

“While this guidance will not ensure that we have zero cases of COVID-19 in our schools, our response must recognize the interconnectedness in our community of our approaches to contain the spread of the coronavirus. We have worked collaboratively with local government, health, education and business leaders to develop this guidance based on the best science and medical advice we currently have,” said Director Dan Partridge. “Our work moving forward is to continue to learn and update this guidance so that we can best support parents, school children, teachers and administrators.”

The [guidelines](#) are available at douglascountyks.org/coronavirus or ldchealth.org/coronavirus

Leaders of Douglas County, City of Lawrence, Lawrence-Douglas County Public Health, LMH Health, University of Kansas, Lawrence Public Schools and The Chamber participate in the Education Unified Command structure, and leaders of Douglas County public and private schools have been represented in conversations to draft these guidelines.

“We rely on proven mitigation strategies to reduce these risks. Schools must implement proper mask technique, adequate physical distancing, frequent hand hygiene, routine cleaning/disinfection and keeping people home when they’re ill,” said Dr. Jennifer Schrimsher, an infectious disease physician at LMH Health. “Families, as well as faculty and staff, can increase the likelihood of a child’s success by discussing the importance of and modeling these behaviors.”

“Ultimately, each family must also decide whether in-person instruction and activities are appropriate for their individual situation. The risks and benefits are not the same for everyone,” said Dr. Thomas Marcellino, Douglas County’s Local Health Officer. “Considerations may include health conditions of a child or family member that could put them at increased risk for severe disease. But we believe coming together as a community to craft these guidelines and this tool will be beneficial for parents, students, teachers, administrators and everyone in our community as we all continue to work together to help limit the spread of the virus.”

The risk-stratification tool is designed to help schools make decisions on when to offer in-person instruction and activities and when to institute mitigation practices. The criteria are based on public health metrics, including the percent of positive tests and new COVID-19 cases in Douglas County based on a 14-day



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rolling average. It also includes a metric based on the level of absenteeism.

“As education professionals, we continue doing our best to develop safe and effective plans for supporting students’ academic and social-emotional needs during this pandemic. When it comes to understanding this disease and how it’s spread, we look to the experts in our local medical community to guide us and recommend prevention measures. This tool gives our data-driven organization and the families we serve clear direction,” said USD 497 Superintendent Anthony Lewis.

“We are fortunate as a school district to be part of this collaborative process through Education Unified Command and grateful to receive these recommendations that are based on science and health practices,” said Paul Dorathy, Superintendent of Baldwin City Schools. “We are interconnected, and we are all stronger as a community when we work together to create environments that can be as safe as possible for students, parents and staff.”

The Douglas County Education Unified Command established a relationship with KU's Pandemic Medical Advisory Team, giving leaders in Education Unified Command a pathway to medical experts and science-based decisions. The PMAT is headed by Dr. Steve Stites, vice chancellor for clinical affairs for KU Medical Center and senior vice president for clinical affairs for The University of Kansas Health System.

Other members include Drs. Schrimsher and Marcellino, Executive Vice Chancellor of KU Medical Center Dr. Rob Simari, as well as leaders from KU's Watkins Health Services and KU faculty.

Members of the public can also check douglascountyks.org/coronavirus or ldchealth.org/coronavirus for information about COVID-19 in Douglas County.

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