

DISTRICT 202 COMMUNITY COLUMN

By Dr. Lane Abrell
Superintendent of Schools
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Dear District 202 Community,

During my 36 years in education (with the last nine as Superintendent of District 202), I have always taken pride in communicating information in a timely manner and answering questions honestly and respectfully. I often say, you may not like or even agree with the answer, but you'll always get an answer.

With that in mind, I want to address a recent communications-related issue that caused some confusion and frustration.

Recently, the CDC released new COVID-19 guidelines cutting the recommended exclusion period from 10 days to five days – but here's where the confusion started.

The new guidelines were only for the “general public,” not for schools and students. Often times, the headlines don't tell the entire story and the media did a poor job of making that clear.

Then, the Illinois Department of Public Health and State Board of Education took about a week to issue their own guidelines for schools based on the new CDC information.

Their initial written 1 ½ page health alert issued on January 7, 2022, laid out some basic information, but clearly stated, “Updated IDPH/ISBE regulations and guidance documents will be released soon” as well as, “This document summarizes the CDC guidance.”

Some school districts around the state issued statements and plans based on that initial guidance from the IDPH/ISBE.

However, District 202 deliberately chose to hold off until we had the final guidance (or, whatever passes for final since, over the last 21 months, this kind of information has changed many times.) That came around 7:30 p.m. on Tuesday, January 11, 2022.

This caused more confusion and frustration among some in our community who wanted to know why “others” were communicating more and faster than us.

The short answer is, there are 852 school districts in Illinois. Each has local control and operates according to its own prerogatives, priorities, and leadership style.

For me, it makes no sense to rush out an incomplete plan based on information we knew would likely change only a few days later. We want to get the story first but, we also want to get the story right. One without the other leads to uncertainty which leads to uneasiness and anxiety.

We understand parents, staff, and even students are tired, frustrated, and ready to be done with this pandemic.

I cannot say more emphatically, so are we.

But we also don't want to make things worse for our families and staff by moving too quickly. Keep in mind, there are a thousand moving parts to every decision made, every step necessary to run an operation our size. If even one – say, bus driver shortages or bad weather or changing guidance – goes wrong, it creates a domino effect from which it is often hard to recover.

As one of our administrators likes to say, there are enough mud puddles in front of us, without us creating more for ourselves.

We certainly want to tell our community everything we possibly can, as quickly as we can. We know people just want to know what's going on. Sometimes even “bad news” is better than no news. We get it.

Still, we must balance that important goal against the many logistical challenges we face every day as we strive to get kids to school, keep them in the classroom, feed them, and provide the full range of academic, athletic, artistic, and personal services and supports that make District 202 so great.

Sometimes we must “slow down the car” just a bit. That's not ideal, certainly, but it's better than having to back up on the highway.

To do that, we rely on our families and staff to be patient and try to understand and remember that we're all working together towards the same end.

That's the most efficient and best way to continue to prepare learners for the future.

Dr. Lane Abrell
Superintendent