

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

Letter from the Desk of the Superintendent

Dear Illinois School for the Deaf Staff,

Thank you for your ongoing flexibility and dedication over the past challenging year. I have continued to be impressed with your ability to adapt and innovate to best educate our students as well as your ongoing commitment to their well-being. While we are happy to hear how well some families are doing in remote learning, we know that many teachers and students are eager to return to the classroom. I am writing to update you on current plans for returning to in-person learning starting in April. 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.

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 5** through the remainder of the 2020-2021 school year. Please note that students can continue distance learning or day school only if that's the best option for them.

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.
- **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.



JB Pritzker, *Governor*

Grace Hou, *Secretary*

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- **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 are currently reaching out to families to determine whether and how they would like their students to return to campus. We are also planning additional opportunities for both families and staff 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.

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