From the field...
Strategies and Lessons Learned

Communicating Positive COVID-19 Cases in Public Schools

September 22, 2020

Moderators

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COVID Communications

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PURPOSE:

To empower districts/schools with communications approaches and strategies to work more efficiently and effectively with their local health departments.

Dr. Betsey Tilson

State Health Director and the Chief Medical Officer for the Department of Health and Human Services

Nora Carr, Guilford County

Libby Brown, Caldwell County

Jennifer Johnson, Pitt County

Dianna Bridges, Thomas Jefferson Academy

Tahira Stalberte, Union County

Ken Derksen, Wayne County

COMMON THREADS

- Identify your tools
- Determine your processes
- Develop your boundaries
- Consider the size of your media market
- Consistency is key!

Caldwell County

Number of Schools-25
Number of Staff-1663
Number of Students-10,735

Libby Brown, Community Services Director

Operations Plan:

The Caldwell County School System began the school year operating under Plan B with a blended education program offering in-person instruction for students two days a week and three days remote on the AA/BB schedule and a full remote option also available to families.

Most Important Lesson:

The most important lesson: Put people's needs first, then a change in operations will be more widely accepted as you set boundaries and consistently adhere to them.

Output	Internal Audience	External Audience
Information Packets		
District Website/App		
You Tube		
Social Media		
News Release		
Radio/PSA	Teachers	Parents
Letters to Parents	Associates	Community Leadership
School Websites	Administrators	Community Agencies
Text Messages	School Board Members	Business Partners
Emails	School Volunteers	Faith-based Partners
Voice Message	Support Staff	Government Leaders
School Walk-Thru		Higher Education
Alert Message		
News Features		
Cable Channel		

Reopening Schools 2020-2021

Create a level of trust and confidence through transparency, consistency and continuous communication.

Caldwell County Schools

RESOURCES:
Caldwell County Schools Guiding Principles
Parent Attestation Form:
https://www.caldwellschools.com/Page/23381

Guilford County

Number of Schools-127
Number of Staff-10,000
Number of Students-72,000

Nora Carr, Chief of Staff

Operations Plan:

Plan C currently; moving to Plan B with gradual phase-in, starting 9/29 with PreK and K on a voluntary basis, K-5 in October and high schools (remote and in person) at the start of 2nd semester in January. Board votes later this week (9/24) whether to adopt or change administration's recommendations. We plan to maintain social distancing to maximum extent possible. Goal is to serve the maximum number of students possible for the maximum amount of time possible while also keeping students and staff as healthy and safe as possible.

Most Important Lesson:

Keep it real; Human faces, voices matter most

Guiding Principles for your Communications Strategy:

Explain the "why" and not just the "what"

Create "snackable" bites of information

Send updates frequently

Put human faces on the information you need to share

Share information internally before you share it externally

Deploy credible messengers and the methods most valued by your stakeholders

Strive for unity of message while using multiple messengers and platforms

Provide communication toolkits for principals, supervisors, parent leaders

Guiding Principles for your Communications Strategy:

Talk like a human – use laymen's terms

Use graphics to illustrate, simplify complex concepts

Partner with public health, PTAs/PTOs, faith, business and community leaders

Build a coalition of the willing and keep them in the loop

Deploy COVID-19 Information Ambassadors

Stay on message/on plan

Carry the NC StrongSchoolsNC Public Health Toolkit with you at all times

Adapt the communications guidance to your local context and media market

Outputs-Internal

- Advisory Councils and Task Forces
- Meeting cascades (currently virtual)
- Employee weekly e-newsletter
- Leadership weekly e-newsletter
- Board of Education Bulletin (weekly)
- Training/professional learning
- Voice mail, text, email

Outputs-External

- BOE meetings (virtual)
- Advisory Councils and Task Forces (virtual meetings)
- Website
- GCSTV
- Social Media (YouTube, Twitter, Facebook, Instagram)
- Database marketing and communications (targeted messaging to specific people/groups)
- Mass notification system (voice mail, text, email, social)
- Community Engagement and Outreach
- Volunteer Communications
- Partner/Donor Communications
- Media Relations

RESOURCES

GCS 2020-2021 School Reopening Website = COVID-19 Communications Hub

Reconnect. Reopen. Stay Safe.

Social Distancing Tour: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lfaQ_HxrpT4&feature=emb_title

Health Protocols and Procedures

Remote Learning Resources

Tech Help for Students

       How to Connect Your GCS Device

Parking Lot Hotspots for Internet Access

SMART Bus Locator, Schedule and Logon Info

Learning Centers for Internet Access

Student Apps – Links and How to Logon

Reopening Schools FAQ

Virtual Schools

Virtual School Registration and FAQ

RESOURCES

GCSTV
Social Media
Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/GCSchoolsNC/
Twitter: https://twitter.com/gcschoolsnc
YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/user/gcschoolsnc
Instagram: https://www.instagram.com/gcschoolsnc/

E-Newsletters
My GCS
Leadership Action Update

Constituency Management
Let's Talk

Data Dashboard
https://us-east-1.online.tableau.com/#/site/guilfordcountyschoolsdataanalytics/views/COVIDReports/COVIDReportMap?:iid=2

Pitt County

Number of Schools-38
Number of Staff-3,600
Number of Students-23,162

Jennifer Johnson, PIO

Operations Plan:

Plan B. 3 groups: 100% virtual students (about 50%), A week and B week students. A and B week alternate between face to face and virtual learning each week.

Most Important Lesson:

Decide boundaries of communicating and reporting ahead of time. As long as the team makes a solid, research-based and supported decision, stick to the decision. Be adaptable, however. Keep revisiting the decisions and boundaries. With each tweak/change, provide information across all resources with reasonings for the change. BE PATIENT. BE THOROUGH. BE CONSISTENT. BE UNIFIED.

Guiding Principles for your Communications Strategy:
To quickly, consistently, and authentically communicate with our stakeholders in an excellent and equitable manner.

Outputs:

Weekly video updates, weekly Q and A with Leaders and outside organizations, weekly summary district update newsletters, specific weekly focus for all communications. Regarding COVID-19 reporting: weekly dashboard and communication protocol for reporting with definitions.

PITT COUNTY SCHOOLS
Strong

COVID-19 Communications
PCS Protocol

PITT COUNTY SCHOOLS Strong

The following *NOTIFICATION PROTOCOL* will be followed once a school is notified of a student or staff member that tests positive for COVID-19, and the case is considered to be school-affected. Pitt County Schools follows communications guidance from the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services and in partnership with the Pitt County Health Department.

School-affected = The individual was recently present in a school building, in close contact with others, less than 6 feet apart, for more than fifteen minutes.

Parents of students identified as close contacts will be notified directly through a letter or phone call with directions on how to proceed, based on PCS/PCHD-determined risk of exposure. Close-contact staff members will be personally notified by school administration.

Parents and Staff members at the individual school will be generally notified by phone of the school-affected positive case.

Weekly district data, including the number of new positive, school-affected cases, will be published online by noon each Friday at http://bit.ly/PCSCovidData

To insure you are receiving *critical notifications,* call your child's school to make sure your contact information is correct in *PowerSchool.*

COVID-19 Update
September 11-17, 2020

PITT COUNTY SCHOOLS Strong

PCS POPULATIONS

11,617 Face-To-Face Students
23,162 Total Students
3600 Employees

OF NEW POSITIVE CASES
(School-Affected)

6

% OF ON-CAMPUS POPULATION
(School-Affected Cases)

.04%
.02% of Total Population

DEFINITIONS & COMMUNICATIONS

School-Affected = Recently present in a school building, in close contact

Close Contact = Within six feet of others for more than fifteen minutes

Communications: Notifications to school families are made for School-Affected cases according to PCS/PCHD/NCDHHS protocols

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Thomas Jefferson Classical Academy

Charter School
Number of Schools-2
Number of Staff-140
Number of Students-1363

Dianna Bridges, Principal
Upper Campus (6-12)

Operations Plan:

We are currently operating in a Plan B/Virtual for our K-9 students and fully remote for 10-12.

Most Important Lesson:

We must continually evaluate how our teachers and students are doing and willing to make the necessary adjustments to ensure we are meeting the needs of both our teachers and students. Challenges we face are always changing.

Outputs: Websites, Live Q&A sessions for parents, Facebook (response quickly to comments and questions)

Union County Public Schools
Number of Schools-58
Number of Students-44,507

Top 3 Guiding Principles/Boundaries

Trust/Timeliness
This strategy helps with timeliness, transparency and allow for a short q-and-a period.

Transparency/Message Control
The media and parents hear the announcement from the district's communications office/or school first and the district is able to control the message.

Collaboration
It is important for us to show that UCPS and the LHD are working together and communicating on a daily/weekly basis.

Tahira Stalberte
Assistant Superintendent of Communication & Community Engagement

Example Tools/Strategies

Internal (Staff)
Principals hold staff meetings to share information about positive cases at schools.

External (Media, Parents)
When cases are announced, parents receive a message at the same time principals hold staff meetings.
Distributed media release when schools closed for two weeks due to COVID-19 cases.

External (Local Health Department)
Participated in Facebook Live with LDH. UCPS lead nurse shared information about processes and answered questions along with health director.

UCPS
UNION COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

RESOURCES
Union County Public Schools-Script-Parent Message

COVID-19 Positive Cases From Student & Staff Physically Occupying UCPS Schools/Facilities

Wayne County Public Schools

Number of Schools- 32
Number of Staff-2,700
Number of Students-17,450

Cultivation, Personalization, Innovation - Every Student Every Day!

Operations Plan: Plan B/Virtual

Most Important Lesson: The "StrongSchoolsNC: Public Health Toolkit (K-12)" and the "Reference Guide for Suspected, Presumptive, or Confirmed Cases of COVID-19 (K-12)" are clear guidance documents that should be posted clearly and shared broadly with families, staff and stakeholders. While it may not be appropriate to release specific actions or details taken as part of a school's/district's response to a particular situation involving a student or staff member who tests positive for COVID-19, it is very appropriate to direct your school community back to these documents so that they can be aware of the official NCDHHS protocols that a school/district will be taking in its response (e.g. Notification to local health department, Cleaning, Communications with students/families/staff, Next Steps...)

Ken Derksen
Communications & Public Relations Officer

Guiding Principles for your Communications Strategy:
Clear, consistent & free of barriers

Outputs (Internal/External):
Internal: Principal email to school staff/WCPS COVID-19 Alert sent to all staff via email
External: App/ social media for district alert / Call system for families of students at impacted school

Wayne County Public Schools Alert:
WCPS has been notified that an individual who was recently on the [INSERT SCHOOL NAME] campus has tested positive for COVID-19. All recommended guidelines from the NC Department of Health and Human Services have been followed. Learn more about the district's COVID-19 response protocols at: https://www.waynecountyschools.org/2020-2021SchoolReopeningUpdates.aspx

As always, please be mindful to wear a mask, wash your hands, and practice social distancing when on a WCPS campus.

Wayne County Public Schools
Cultivation, Personalization, Innovation - Every Student Every Day!

Let's Keep the Conversation Going…

PR Check-Ins with ncspra.org
Weekly Until October 9
Look for details in this meeting's follow-up!

NCDHHS K-12 Communications Resources

September 22, 2020

NCDHHS COVID-19 Communications Resources

Example Slides

NCDHHS Communications Resources

- [For Families: What to Expect When Schools Reopen](#) ([Spanish](#))

- [What Are We Learning About COVID-19 and Children?](#) ([Spanish](#))

- [Frequently Asked Questions](#) ([Spanish](#))

- [K-12 Social Media Outreach](#) ([Spanish](#))

- [Wearing Masks at School Video](#) ([Spanish](#))

- [NCDHHS Protect and Prevent Media Toolkit](#)
  - Spanish/English: Social media posts, flyers, videos
  - Topics: Contact tracing, finding a testing site, checking symptoms, cloth face coverings, 3 Ws
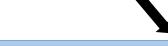
Contact Tracing: Opportunity for Clear Communications Structures

Example Slides

Reporting Pathway: K – 12 Child Positive Case in a School

Child tests positive for COVID-19

Lab reports positive test to Division of Public Health or Local Health Department (LHD)
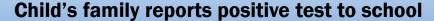
Positive results shared with child's family

Child's family reports positive test to school

Family chooses whether or not to report to school

LHD conducts case investigation to determine source of exposure and who might have been exposed
- **Calls family to interview about the case**
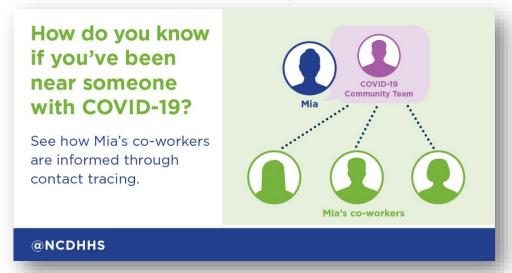- **Calls school if child was present during infectious period or exposure period**

School (principal) reports case to LHD

If notified by family (or suspects positive case), principal required to report case to LHD

School affiliation added here by LHD: dropdown menu to link case to a school

LHD enters case information in NCCOVID data system, visible to NCDHHS

Contract Tracing – How Schools Can Support Local Health Departments

How do you know if you've been near someone with COVID-19?

See how Mia's co-workers are informed through contact tracing.
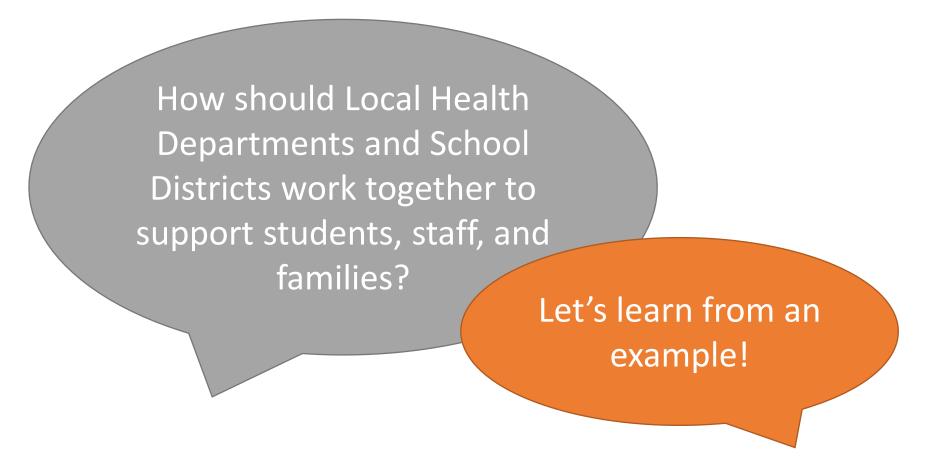
Mia

COVID-19 Community Team

Mia's co-workers

@NCDHHS

1. Schools should identify their own point of contact and their point of contact within the local health department for ongoing follow-up about positive cases and contact tracing.

2. Schools should consult with the local health department as they make plans for determining and communicating with close contacts

3. Schools should consult with the local health department to agree on an easy-to-use format (such as a standardized spreadsheet) to provide prompt information about close contacts if requested in the future

July 29th Local Health Department/LEA Webinar

Example Slides

School Districts and LHDs – a critical partnership

How should Local Health Departments and School Districts work together to support students, staff, and families?

Let's learn from an example!

Collaboration in Action: Hoke County

- ## Designated a point of contact
  - The Superintendent designated the Executive Director of Student Support Services as the schools liaison to work with the Hoke County Health Director.

- ## Regular meetings
  - The Hoke County Health Director and the Executive Director of Student Support Services meet weekly to share information, such as surveillance data.

- ## Feedback on planning
  - The HCS Re-entry Plan has been shared and discussed with the Hoke County Health Department

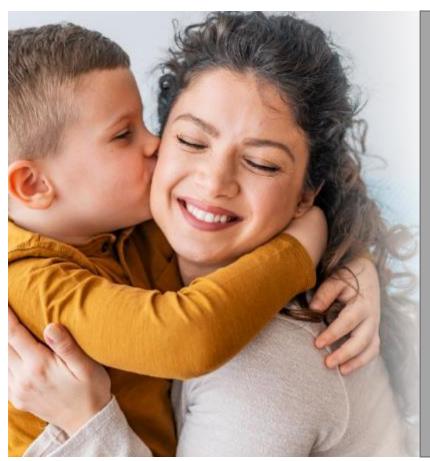# Collaboration in Action: Hoke County

- **LHD serves as a resource**
  - The Hoke County Health Department has provided the school system with information regarding cleaning, screening, testing and reporting cases.

- **Support access to testing**
  - Currently discussing the possibility of establishing a drive-thru site at the health department once school begins. If they have a suspected case, this will allow parents to immediately access services for their child.

Key Takeaway 1

Established, ongoing partnerships between Local Health Departments and School Districts help us all

Operationalizing Health Protocols

How should School Districts prepare for and operationalize health protocols to support students, staff, and families?

Let's learn from an example!

Health Protocols in Schools:
Buncombe County JumpStart

- ## Communications to Staff
  - Each school had the phone number of the nurse on call for each week of Jump Start, and principals knew to call this number with any health-related concerns in order to determine next steps.
  - Webinars and flow charts for staff and admin. that reviewed protocols for health and safety, face coverings, transportation, cleaning
  - Increased staffing at the school level for screening

- ## Communications to Students & Families
  - Created COVID Protocols for Students
  - Created letter to to parents in the event that the child had to be excluded from school due to COVID symptoms. This letter gave specific directions to parents on next steps.

Health Protocols in Schools:
Buncombe County JumpStart

"It is great to have students in the building again. Schools look a lot different with all the new safety protocols in place, but we still have the same goal to educate and care for kids." - Principal Philip Chandler

- ## How'd it go?
  - Clear protocols in place – next steps were known when a child/adult screened positive
  - Time required for screening at entry went down after initial learning curve
  - A small number of students were sent home for becoming symptomatic during the day
  - No positive cases reported

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Key Takeaway 2

Planning for rapid internal communication and health protocols throughout a school district leads to smooth operations

Three Recommended Next Steps for Superintendents and Local Health Departments:

1. Establish one point of contact at the school district and one point of contact at the LHD

2. Provide detailed, procedural feedback on school plans for reopening

3. Create a student, family, and school staff communication plan on health protocols