Recently, I reread a communication I sent to families last spring. In it, I characterized the time as being one during which there is rapid change and evolving understanding. We have come a long way since then. We understand a lot more about the Coronavirus and how to live our lives in the throes of a global pandemic. Yet and still, we find ourselves in a time of change and evolving understanding. On Friday, February 12th, the Center for Disease Control (CDC) released an updated guidance for schools. For the first time, the CDC has provided specific community transmission metrics designed to inform a mode for learning. It also drills down to specific mitigation strategies all schools should employ for in-person learning. The guidance is new and there has yet to be a state-level response or interpretation. Nonetheless, in some ways it is a representation of important steps forward, providing guidance for the remainder of the school year and informing projections as to what might be in store for the 2021-22 school year.

Headlining the guidance is a strong declaration, “K–12 schools should be the last settings to close after all other mitigation measures in the community have been employed, and the first to reopen when they can do so safely.” Unsurprisingly, much of the guidance leans heavily on and provides direction for districts providing in-person learning. While there has been a strong emphasis on transmission in schools as a decision factor, the guidance makes clear that COVID-19 spread within the community should drive decisions related to mode of learning in schools. The graphic below displays metrics to determine the degree to which a community is at risk for transmission of COVID. This is based on seven days of data.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>Lowest Transmission</th>
<th>Moderate Transmission</th>
<th>Substantial Transmission</th>
<th>High Transmission</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total new cases per 100,000 persons in the past 7 days***</td>
<td>Category no longer exists. It has been merged into one low transmission (blue) category.</td>
<td>0-9</td>
<td>10-49</td>
<td>50-99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of NAATs that are positive in the past 7 days***</td>
<td>&lt;5.0%</td>
<td>5.0%-7.9%</td>
<td>8.0%-9.9%</td>
<td>≥10.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Upon designation of where a community stands on the color-coded metric, there is a corresponding recommendation for mode of learning. Clear in the graphic below, districts that are employing a regular testing protocol, which Lynn is in process, and are in the yellow category, which Lynn is presently, should be in a learning mode that offers in-person services for all students K-12.
In conjunction with the suggestion for a mode of learning there are specific mitigation strategies. All of the strategies are fairly familiar and have been in practice for months:

- **Physical distancing**
- **Mask wearing**
- **Hand washing**
- **Cleaning and sanitizing**
- **Contact tracing**

To be clear, the CDC calls for strict implementation of all of the mitigation strategies with particular emphasis on the two in bold during in-person learning. While mask wearing is common and fairly easily applied, physical distancing in a context with high enrollment and limited space is not. The guidance calls for physical distancing at a degree of *six feet or more to the greatest extent possible*. There are alternatives related to physical distancing in the effort to get students back in person that need to be more closely explored.

I share in the general enthusiasm around a return to in-person. The notable downward trend in positive cases in our community moves us closer to doing so safely. The new CDC guidance provides a clear path for a return to in-person, however some of the important mitigation strategies might prove challenging in our schools. We have proposed a plan for in-person for the third quarter with intent to reassess on April 9th. This gives us time to better understand the nuances of the guidance, review the recently updated state guidance, and plan accordingly. Our community has and continues to weather a tough time. There is a slight glimmer of light and we intend to embrace it wholeheartedly.

Respectfully Submitted,

Patrick Tutwiler, PhD