



East government teacher Pete Maus cleans students' desks in between classes.

# SAFETY IN NUMBERS

In-person learning during a pandemic has presented new challenges, but Lakota has worked to implement safety protocols that allow students to continue to learn in-person as long as possible.

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Walking into East, students and staff face a sea of masked-faces lining hallways, as hand sanitizer dispensers act as a constant reminder of the new reality that faces the world. Assigned seats spaced three feet apart in the cafeteria and arrows guiding directional flow in the hallways show that the 2020-2021 school year is far from normal. By choosing to allow students to take part in in-person learning, Lakota East has allowed students to have a glimpse of normalcy, adjusting procedures to include safety measures to protect students and staff from the COVID-19 in the process.

Across the Lakota district, students and staff are required to wear a face mask at all times throughout the school day. The exceptions to this rule are while eating lunch and during outdoor mask breaks when people are spaced six feet or more apart. In classrooms, desks are spaced three feet apart, and staff and students are encouraged to complete a daily health assessment checklist before coming to school.

In developing safety protocols, the Lakota Local School District worked closely alongside

the Butler County Health Department (BCHD) in order to develop safety procedures before the start of the school year. According to Lakota Manager of Health Services Lauren Brown, routine meetings, guidance for isolation, and rules for those who have been in close contact with a positive case have all been provided by the BCHD.

Recommendations from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the Ohio Department of Health, Butler County Health Department, Cincinnati Children's Hospital and more were all reviewed as different departments by Lakota. This included the collaboration of transportation, facilities and maintenance, communications, nursing, and Human Resources.

"We reviewed resources from other states and professional associations. After our own independent review, we collaborated on what works for our large district," Brown said. "The hardest part was that guidance and science was being continually updated as new discoveries about COVID-19 were found. The safety protocols were truly a joint project."

According to East principal Yejide Mack, East staff began to develop safety protocols in July, taking into account travel patterns, signage, and places people could congregate in order to prepare for the upcoming school year.

"There's a possibility that we could have been shut down by now," Mack said. "So trying to be proactive in our planning and trying to be proactive in communicating to [the students] as well, is a huge piece in any change. That includes the safety protocols."

Developing safety protocols required collaboration between districts and other schools alongside specialists in health.

"I feel with most things, you want to know the things that work and you want to know the things that don't work," Mack said. "So [developing safety protocols] required constant communication from different districts, different principals, and different buildings to say, hey, what are you guys doing? What are you going to put into play?"

Lakota was one of the first districts in the Butler County area to start in-person learning



East teachers utilize the designated buckets for cleaning towels after disinfecting students' desks.



Social distancing markers are spread throughout the school to remind students to stay six feet apart.

after months of completely remote learning in the spring. According to Mack, other districts were able to learn from Lakota as they entered a new kind of learning environment.

"Some of the districts that started after us were able to see some of the things that we did wrong, or things that didn't work, and were able to incorporate those," Mack said. "But I think districts around the city of Cincinnati have been very good about collaborating and working together, to figure out what's good, what's bad, what shouldn't we do, and what should we do."

As part of the daily health assessment which includes a checklist of symptoms, students and staff are supposed to take their temperature while still at home, rather than when they get to school. According to the CDC and other studies and surveillance data of the novel COVID-19, a high temperature is just one indicator that someone may have the virus. People can be asymptomatic and still test positive, while others may experience other symptoms without a fever and test positive.

"It is estimated that a temperature screening would take about 30 seconds per student to retrieve the student's name, take and record the temperature and proceed to the next student," Brown said. "Think about a school of 1,000 students, at 30 seconds per student with possibly eight entrances. It would take us at least one hour to screen all students to enter the building. We felt it was best to ask parents to partner with us to monitor at home."

Along with consuming instructional time, Brown said that it would only increase the inability for students to social distance if they had to wait in line for the screening. For students who ride the bus, they would already be interacting with others before reaching school where a temperature check could take place.

Lakota Chief Operations Officer Chris Passarge worked alongside Brown in developing

the new safety protocols.

"We asked for students and parents to take on this responsibility to help ensure that once students got to school, we could get everyone in the buildings in a safe and efficient manner," Passarge said.

According to Brown, despite having desks spaced three-feet apart, anyone within six feet of a person who tests positive for 15 minutes or longer has to quarantine. Wearing face coverings greatly decreases the risk of transmission, and Brown says students and staff have been doing a good job with that.

"The gold standard for social distancing is six feet apart based on studies on how far respiratory droplets can travel. However, according to the head of Infectious Diseases at Cincinnati Children's, even three feet has been shown to have some effectiveness in stopping transmission of the virus," Brown said. "We have space limitations within our buildings, many students who are in the classrooms and maintaining six feet would be impossible in a full, in-person learning environment."

Alongside other safety procedures, East has implemented a block day schedule every day. Students attend three bells a day, or four if they take a zero bell. Weeks that start with a 0,1,3,5 day are entitled "Hawk Weeks", while weeks starting with a 0,2,4,6 day are known as "Thunder Weeks." With this schedule change, every passing period was changed to five minutes, in contrast to the 2019-2020 schedule that contained 10-minute passing periods on block days.

East Athletic Director Richard Bryant aided in designing the safety protocols specific to East that emphasize a need for distancing and safety.

"The 10-minute passing period is five minutes of going to your locker, or maybe hitting the restroom and then five minutes of talking," Bryant said. "What we can't have is large groups congregating in the hallways

during passing periods."

According to East teacher Lisa Landers, teachers were given gloves, disinfectant spray, and towels that are then deposited in buckets located in the hallways after being used to wipe down desks between class periods. For Landers, cleaning the desks in her classroom takes almost the entire five-minute passing period.

"The process for creating safety protocols was based on the guidance from local, state and federal health officials," Passarge said. "The district decided that the adults should oversee the cleaning process to ensure increased safety measures and correct application of the cleaning standards."

According to East senior Kelly Ekberg, maintaining social distancing in the hallways is near impossible. Even just walking between classes is a challenge, as the entire building floods the halls at once.

"As far as masks go, I feel like people are doing a pretty good job for the most part," Ekberg said. "People are not social distancing which is not really their fault, but that part is not happening. Going to the bathroom or lockers doesn't allow for people to follow the suggested [safety] guidelines."

Landers feels safe within her classroom, but she has seen an issue with students failing to social distance outside of the classroom, similar to what Ekberg has seen.

"I really haven't had any issues with [masks], but I don't think they're social distancing," Landers said. "I always tell them, get yourself away from people. But I feel like it's just natural to want to gravitate towards people and talk."

Bryant does not see as much of an issue within the walls of the school; rather, he's concerned about what is happening outside of it.

"The mask-wearing, the hand sanitizing, the good hygiene, and the social distancing make it very difficult for there to be an issue here [in school]," Bryant said. "I think the bigger

issue is kids congregating outside of school. Attending parties, sleepovers, and those types of things can get the kids in trouble.”

Despite that, Bryant thinks the safety measures have been effective thus far, as Lakota continues to have students learn in-person without a shutdown. However, the district has seen a rise in cases, with the Lakota COVID-19 Dashboard showing 4 students testing positive and 6 staff members testing positive for the week of Oct. 10-16.

“I think the students have been phenomenal [while in the building]. I think the teachers have been phenomenal. The fact that we’re entering into our fifth week of school, with very little interruption [is encouraging,” Bryant said. “I see a lot of value in [students] being able to come to school every day and have some sense of normalcy.”

Ekberg appreciates being able to interact with friends and teachers while East is able to be in-person, but she does see issues within the safety protocols that need adjustments.

“I didn’t know what to expect going back to school, but getting to see friends makes it worth it,” Ekberg said. “I think that for the circumstances that we are under, [East is] doing the best that they can. It’s not perfect, but I think it’s about as efficient as it can be.”

Mack agrees with this sentiment. Allowing for in-person learning while in a pandemic brought up problems that would have been seen as absurd to someone in early 2020, but the collaboration between staff, students, parents, and officials has allowed in-person learning to last this long.

“We could be better. I definitely think there are going to have to be some reminders because we’re human, and we do get comfortable in our surroundings,” Mack said. “But I think right now students are effectively following [the safety protocols] because I don’t think that we would have been able to make it this far without them.”

# THE NEED TO CLEAN

A comparison of cleaning procedures between Lakota, Mason, and Kings high schools. • sidebar **mary barone**

The school year of 2020-2021 began like no other: amid a global pandemic. With only months to prepare for the oncoming fleet of students walking back into their doors, schools had to rush to find the most effective and efficient ways to keep their staff and students safe from the infamous coronavirus. Three local school districts, Lakota, Mason, and Kings, are approaching the situation differently based on their individual class sizes and budgets. Mason and Kings’ cleaning procedures are a result of a collaboration with the Warren County Health Department while the Lakota district worked with the Butler County Health Department. Following their guidelines, school administrators put methods in place that heavily rely on the hard work of both teachers and their custodial staff. All three schools are practicing social distancing along with contact tracing and a strict mask-wearing policy. After class, their custodial staffs come in and thoroughly disinfect the buildings.

East Athletic Director Richard Bryant especially admires the extra work that teachers put in to keep their classrooms clean. “The simplest task is not simple any more,” Bryant said. “There is a significant increase in workload, stress, and anxiety. But I think most people in our building would do just about anything for our wonderful students to have the ability to come to school every day. And that’s why we do what we do.”

While the three districts share many of the same procedures, there are slight differences

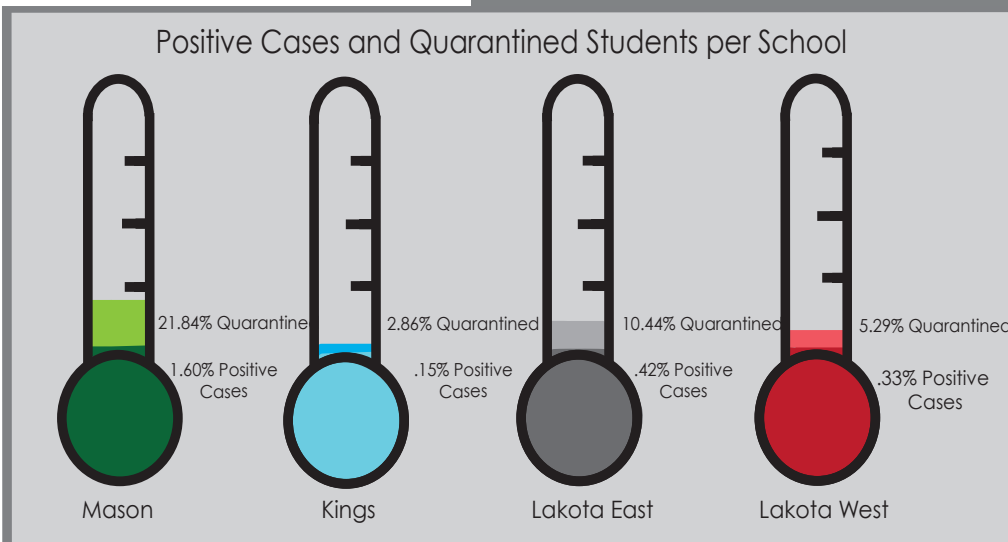
among them. Mason High School does not require teachers to use gloves while they are cleaning desks between classes while Lakota East provides reusable gardening-type gloves for their teachers. However, many teachers do not find these gloves effective and instead choose to go out and buy their own disposable cleaning gloves. Kings teachers are provided with gloves in their medical supplies kits but teachers do not clean desks between classes. Instead, once a month the district wipes desks down with a chemical called Penetrex which, according to various sources, has the capability to disinfect a surface for anywhere from 30 to 90 days. The product is on the market ranging from \$325 to \$399 per 5 gallons.

“I think our building has done a wonderful job responding to this situation, Mason Vice Principal Brandon Rompies said. “Everyone recognizes the need right now so it makes it kind of easy to ask people to do things differently.”

Each of the schools also have different procedures surrounding passing periods. Both Mason and Lakota West give their students 10 minutes to get to their next class. These schedules make it easier on teachers by giving them more time to disinfect desks before their next round of students come in. Kings, which does not require teachers to clean between classes, allows their students five minutes to travel to get to their next destination but, unlike the other schools, they do not allow students to stop at their lockers. East also gives their students five minutes, anticipating that a shorter passing period will limit student interaction in the hallways. However, this rushed time frame makes it more difficult for teachers to sanitize desks.

Lakota East English and Speech teacher David Honhart has experienced firsthand what it’s like to scramble to sterilize desks between periods.

“It’s a challenge in terms of how do you get every desk clean, while still keeping students spaced,” said Honhart. “I think everyone’s probably adapted in their own way and I think we all just kind of accept now, if I have to be a minute or two late to class because I need to run to the bathroom, so be it.”



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