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The Illini West High School board approved a “test to stay” program for students and staff at their regular board meeting Oct. 20.

- This program provides a way to avoid long quarantine times for healthy students or staff who have been in close contact with a person who tests positive for covid-19 or has symptoms.
- Under the current executive order, the school must “...exclude any student or school personnel who is a close contact for a minimum of 14 days or as otherwise directed by the school’s local health authority.”
- The order further states: “As an alternative to exclusion, schools may permit close contacts who are asymptomatic to be on the school premises, extracurricular events, or any other events organized by the school if both the confirmed case or probable case and the contact were masked for the entire exposure period and provided the contact tests negative on days 1, 3, 5 and 7 following the exposure.”
- Superintendent Jay Harnack said, if a person at the school tests positive or has symptoms, the school must notify close contacts to the Hancock County Health Department.
- The close contact person can continue to attend school as long as he or she tests negative.
- Harnack said quarantines have not been a problem at school so far, since the staff and students have maintained masking and kept to proper distances. Cases could increase as the weather becomes cold and more indoor sports and activities take place.
- The test to stay plan is voluntary, Harnack noted. Families can also choose the quarantine requirement.
- The board wanted students and staff to have the option of the “test to stay” program.

In related action, the board approved an amended “Return to School” plan with the following statement:

- “The district will cooperate with the Hancock County Health Department in providing information related to close contacts of COVID-19 positive and probable cases for contract tracing purposes. In addition, the District will enforce all lawful quarantine directives issued by the Hancock County Health Department including any court orders for quarantine periods over 48 hours.
- “In the event that recommended State or Federal guidance provides for a longer period of quarantine, the school district will request but will not require parents to quarantine their healthy children for the duration of the recommended time period or participate in the District’s test to stay protocol.”

Annual financial report

The board received and approved the annual district financial report from Jeff McPherson of Gray, Hunter Stenn LLP.

- McPherson said the district earned the highest 4.0 rating, noting the district has good cash balances, with 305 days of cash on hand.
- Findings in the report included the problem of “segregation of duties” which happens in many smaller districts, when one person does several of the bookkeeping duties.
- He noted that care needs to be taken to secure principal approval for spending from activity funds. He had reviewed and was assured all covid grant funds had been spent appropriately.

The board approved a three-year contract with Bushue Risk Management Services to oversee forms and procedures related to human resources.

- “Regardless of our size, we all have to do unemployment law, we have to do all the same H.R. things as districts with far more personnel,” Harnack said. “It is a tremendous challenge to keep up when you are trying to wear multiple hats.
- “This firm is used in a lot of districts in Illinois to make sure all forms and processes, from the first time a person applies for a job to when they exit, will meet requirements, in addition to assistance with insurance programs, risk managements and a variety of things.”
- President John Huston compared this service to using the policy service to keep up with all changes and requirements on school policy.
- They will provide recommendations to the district, work at the request of Illini West, and give training as needed for many areas.

Other news

- Graduation was approved for May 15, 2022. Three early graduation requests were approved.
- A levy hearing was set for 7 p.m. on Wednesday, Dec. 15, before that monthly board meeting.
- The board delayed approving a bid for architectural work from Klingner Associates for HVAC work in the gymnasium. They asked Harnack to provide information on possible use of a performance contractor to design, estimate costs, and complete the work.
- The board employed Dustin Logan and Brian Huff as football coaches, allowing them to split a coaching stipend.
- In his report, Harnack told of the successful collaboration with Sleep in Heavenly Peace, organized by the IW Key Club. With many students participating, seven bunk beds were built for students in need.
- Illini West held its first ever Wellness Fair on Oct. 15, with free screenings provided to staff and lunch from Memorial Hospital.
- Director of Student Services, Grant Surprenant, said that student attendance was 91.4 percent for September, with 28 referrals for positive behavior.
- Principal Jim Short said homecoming was successful, with a dance held outside. The school received a SAWA (Sport a Winning Attitude) award from IHSA, based on positive actions seen by referees at the football game at Knoxville.
- Mrs. Kniel held band day on Oct. 8, with junior high bands from the three elementary feeder districts coming to join with the high school band and performing at the football game that night.