



January 14, 2021

## **The Orange County Classroom Teacher Association (OCCTA) Opposes the District's Proposals to Shorten the Quarantine Period and Other Proposed Changes to the COVID-19 Health and Safety Procedures Manual**

OCCTA disagrees with the proposed changes to the COVID-19 Health and Safety Procedures Manual that were presented to us in an email from LeighAnn Blackmore dated January 5, 2021. The changes focus on shortening the 14-day quarantine period for students and employees of Orange County Public Schools. OCCTA is opposed to shortening quarantine days for the following reasons:

First, the CDC recommendation states, “**CDC currently recommends a 14 day quarantine period of 14 days.** However, based on local circumstances and resources, the following options to shorten quarantines are acceptable. . .” The report continues to outline the 10 and 7 day quarantine options. Clearly, even as the CDC stated, the 14-day option is the most protective and OCCTA supports following that the 14-day quarantine period.

Furthermore, the CDC reports states that decisions on the quarantine period should be “based on local circumstances and resources”. At this time our local circumstances indicate that we are in the largest surge we have seen since the beginning of the pandemic. Orange County broke a record for the most Covid-19 cases in a single day last week and the cases have skyrocketed in our schools. OCPS also broke a record for the most reported cases in a single day, with 118 on Monday. Florida has not reported less than 10,000 new daily cases since December 28, 2020 and our positivity rate has been over 10% for the last 14 days. Yesterday, Florida became the third state to surpass 1.5 million cases. Surely, this is not the time to relax quarantine periods.

Additionally, teachers have reported that they contracted Covid-19 in school from another individual. Students' parents have also reported that their children caught the virus from another student in school. Despite denials by District leaders, there is evidence that the virus has and is spreading in OCPS schools and worksites. We must make decisions slowly and deliberately. We must always prioritize what will provide the most protection to our students, employees and the community at large -not what is financially convenient - such as for the purpose of getting teachers and other employees back to work as soon as possible to save money on leave and substitutes.

OCPS does not require a negative test for returning to a school or worksite after the quarantine period has ended. This is another reason to maintain the 14-day quarantine period. Right now we have teachers who are terrified that they will catch this dangerous virus, some of them with ADA accommodations were ordered back to schools, which are even more crowded than they were prior to the Winter Break when we had less crowding and less cases.

I want to share more evidence that these changes are not in the best interest of OCPS students and employees. Regarding the possible reduction of the number of quarantine days, a December 22, 2020 **The New York Times** editorial by Pediatrician Aaron E. Carroll (<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/12/22/opinion/cdc-quarantine-guidelines.html>) states:

“Given that cases have [risen 50 percent](#) in the past month and hospitals are filling up, it’s puzzling that anyone would think that *now* is the time to be more relaxed.

Leaving these decisions up to individuals and local officials increases confusion. At my university and health care system, many people who’ve read about the changes in guidance have asked me what we are doing in response. Most people I hear from don’t understand which pathway is ideal, which one their local officials might prefer, or why.

. . . But the role of the C.D.C. is not to tell us what we might tolerate. It’s to tell us what we should do, regardless of whether we want to do it. It’s the agency’s job to evaluate the science and provide its best read on how we should respond. If the science supports a 14-day quarantine, the C.D.C. should make that unequivocally clear, without clouding the picture by adding second and third options.”

A January 2021 article by **NewsMax Health** ( <https://www.kmjnow.com/news/how-long-are-you-contagious-with-covid-19/> ) states:

“A full 14-day quarantine remains the best way to avoid spreading the virus to others after you’ve been exposed to someone with COVID-19,” write the Harvard experts, acknowledging that the CDC guidelines now say you can end your quarantine after 10 days if you don’t have any symptoms, or after seven days if you have a negative COVID-19 test two days before you plan to finish quarantine.”

An MSNBC article (<https://www.cnbc.com/2020/12/02/cdc-says-14-day-quarantine-best-way-to-reduce-covid-risk-but-10-and-7-day-periods-work-in-some-cases.html> ) states what I stated previously:

“The CDC still recommends a 14-day quarantine “as the best way to reduce the risk of spreading Covid-19.”

HR Daily Advisor (<https://hrdailyadvisor.blr.com/2021/01/13/dissecting-cdcs-new-shorter-quarantine-options/>) cautions:

“Employers must understand, however, the new recommendations come with increased risks for post quarantine transmission and were based on the best information available in November 2020. As a result, the CDC was reserving the right to monitor the evolving science and reconsider its advice over time.

Accordingly, you should be cautious in deciding whether to change your current COVID-19 policies because of the increased risk inherent in permitting employees to return to the workplace sooner than the 14-day quarantine period would allow.”

The Florida DOH even states that the 14-day quarantine is the best option. The following language was taken from their website on January 13, 2021:

Ideally, close contacts to cases of COVID-19 may return after completing a 14 day quarantine from the date of last exposure to the case. An alternative quarantine option that asymptomatic close contacts may follow includes being tested by PCR on Day 6 or later. If negative, they may leave quarantine after Day 7. Without testing, quarantine can end after Day 10, if no symptoms have been reported during daily monitoring. In both of these scenarios, individuals should continue to monitor for symptoms and practice social distancing, good hand hygiene, correct and consistent mask use, etc... through Day 14. Close contacts who develop symptoms within the 14 days should seek medical care and testing. Once the contact's symptoms resolve, if they test PCR-negative for COVID-19 on Day 6 or later after exposure, the contact may return to school and activities after the 7-day quarantine period ends. If the contact tests positive or does not seek testing at all, then the individual is considered a case and should follow the release from isolation guidance for cases of COVID-19."

***I want to ask this committee, what was the opinion of our School Board's Medical Advisory Committee members regarding this change?*** Do they agree with the CDC and other experts that say that the 14-day quarantine is the best way to avoid spread?

Additionally, OCCTA objects to the removal of pages 86, *Daily Home Screening* and page 87, *FLDOH Contact Tracing Process*. Until the Florida Department of Health makes changes, we would like these pages to remain in the manual.

The latest advise from the FLDOH written on December 4, 2020 regarding the important role of parents and guardians states:

“School administrators and teachers should communicate clearly and frequently with parents and guardians about keeping students home if they are symptomatic, have tested positive for COVID-19, or have had close contact to a case of COVID-19. Additionally, parents and guardians should screen their children prior to bringing them to school to ensure that students are not symptomatic. Symptomatic children should be taken to a medical provider to be appropriately evaluated and tested.”

It is OCCTA's position that page 86 should remain.

Concerning page 87, *FLDOH Contact Tracing Process*, it is OCCTA's position that this language should remain.

Finally, the only change that we recommend on pages 58, 59, 61 and 64 is to make the pages easier to read. The type is so tiny that it is impossible to read without a magnifying glass.

In conclusion, OCCTA strongly objects to the changes that the District has proposed to the manual.