



Do You Know the COVID-19 Threshold for Your Children's School Building to Close or Reopen?

By Educator Barnes – November 9, 2020

During this election cycle, voting records were broken. People were more engaged in politics. This particular election included a presidential election which tends to get more people out to vote. Not only did citizens get to vote for who would be the next president of the United States of America, but many people also voted for the school board.

The interest in national or local leaders should not stop after ballots are completed. Elected officials make decisions that affect the citizens who voted them into office. Citizens should pay attention to their actions and push back if those actions do not align with their wishes.

One of the decisions school board members take is deciding when school buildings close or reopen due to the COVID-19 positivity rate. The Marion County Public Health Department has a [dashboard](#) that tracks the COVID-19 positivity rate and provides guidance for schools. The dashboard is divided into four zones: green, yellow, orange, and red. Currently, Marion County is in the yellow zone at a 9.3% positivity rate. An 11% rate would put Marion County into the orange zone.

| Criteria (Improvement must be sustained for 2 weeks before level changes) | Level | Elementary School | Middle School | High School |
|--|--------|-------------------|---------------|-------------------------|
| Percent Positive less than or equal to 5 AND 7-day average number of cases less than or equal to 35 | Green | in-person | in-person | in-person |
| A percent positive greater than 5, less than 11 | Yellow | in-person | in-person | hybrid in-person/online |
| A percent positive greater than or equal to 11, less than 13 | Orange | in-person | in-person | no in-person |
| A percent positive of 13 or higher | Red | no in-person | no in-person | no in-person |

Source: Marion County Public Health Department

Even with guidance from the health department, the school board still makes decisions about closing and reopening school buildings. Although some school districts in Marion County reopened with an in-person option when the school year began, two districts, IPS and Washington Township did not. Those districts reopened 100% virtual.

The Washington Township school board voted for the district to reopen when the COVID-19 positivity rate was at 5.0% or lower for two consecutive weeks. Once this occurred, the district offered an in-person option for elementary and a hybrid option for secondary after fall break.

Then, the district's guidance has changed. The threshold has changed from 5.0% or lower for an in-person option for elementary and a hybrid option for secondary to 8.0% or lower for an in-person option for elementary and a hybrid option for secondary.

As the COVID-19 positivity rate has increased, Washington Township increased the rate at which the COVID-19 rate would have to be for two consecutive weeks for the school buildings to close again.

It is important for families to pay attention to changes in decisions. The best way to stay updated is to attend school board meetings which are now typically livestreamed due to

COVID-19. Parents can check the school district's website for updates. Some school districts such as Lawrence, Wayne, and Washington all use the app ParentSquare. This app sends parents school and district updates, but parents have to sign up.

If these changes are of concern parents should contact their school board members. However, parents won't know what to push for if they are not staying engaged