

Daily News

Saturday, July 17, 2021

Ionia, Montcalm school districts unsure of COVID-19 restrictions for upcoming school year

By [Cory Smith](#) | on July 17, 2021



Greenville Public Schools Board of Education Vice President Kire Wierda, left, listens as Trustee Jodi Petersen asks a question during the July 12 meeting of the board. Comments from the public centered on what the upcoming school year may look like regarding potential COVID-19 restrictions. — DN Photo | Cory Smith

As summer continues to move along mid-swing through July, school administrators and concerned parents already have their thoughts focused on the start of school, now just one month away.

This was made evident during the July 12 meeting of the Greenville Public Schools Board of Education, as members of the public came forward with concerns — at the forefront is what kind of COVID-19 restrictions may be in place as students return to the classroom.

“I was just wondering, what is the mask mandate for this upcoming school year? Are the kids going to have to wear a mask or not?” Robert Lowry of Montcalm Township asked.

It’s a question no school district has a definite answer to yet as administrators continue to wait for recommendations and possible mandates from local, state and federal health departments.

As of now, there are no state requirements, only recommendations, regarding face masks. However, in some instances, federal restrictions from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) are in place, such as a requirement for face masks to be worn on public transportation — including school buses.

Greenville Superintendent Linda Van Houten said the school district is currently awaiting guidance from the Mid-Michigan District Health Department (MMDHD) on how to move forward on topics ranging from face masks, social distancing and the role vaccinations may play — if at all. In the meantime, Van Houten said the district has been operating throughout the summer without any mask or vaccination requirements.

“We are waiting for guidance from the health department,” she said. “I have a meeting with them next week. Right now there is no mandate for masks, but we’re waiting to see if there’s any other information that comes from the state or the county and then we’ll be sharing that information with parents at the end of July.”

In having asked the same question and received the same response from Van Houten, Becky Allen of Eureka Township said she felt the school board should make a decision before receiving input from the health department, noting the short timeframe before the start of the school year.

“I understand that’s right now, but we all understand what the health department is going to suggest,” she said. “I’m seeing schools that are coming out with their letters, and I’m wondering when the school board is going to get together and discuss it with themselves, and not with the state guidance, because I see there are a lot of surrounding school districts that have already made a decision.”

Of the nine public school districts in the Daily News coverage area, five of those districts — Central Montcalm, Ionia, Lakeview, Tri County and Vestaburg — have released statements that they will not require students to wear masks, among other decisions, for the upcoming school year.



From left, Greenville Public Schools Director Finance Maureen Fleet, Board of Education Vice President Kire Wierda, Trustee Jodi Petersen, President Norice Rasmussen, Superintendent Linda Van Houten, Treasurer Jim Anderson, Trustee Rocky Hansen and Human Resources Director Linda Steed meet on July 12. Comments from the public centered on what the upcoming school year may look like regarding potential COVID-19 restrictions. — DN Photo | Cory Smith

Belding, Carson City-Crystal, Greenville and Montabella have not yet finalized a decision; however, all four of those districts are currently working on a plan.

“The Board of Education will meet next week and they plan to pass a plan at that time,” Montabella Superintendent Shelly Millis told the Daily News. “Communication to parents and families will take place after that meeting.”

“I have not yet put together a formal plan for the fall, I will, however, tell you that it is my thought at this point in time that we will only implement ‘mandates’ by the state and not ‘recommendations,’” Belding Superintendent Brent Noskey told the Daily News. “I will need to meet with my board and my (teacher’s union) on this topic before I put anything official out.”

While five districts have announced plans that masks will be worn, all five superintendents of those districts prefaced those statements by stating the decision could change pending guidelines released by local, state and federal health departments. That includes Tri County, where Superintendent Allen Cummings communicated on July 8 to parents that the district would not be requiring face masks; any quarantines to be issued would be done so by the MMDHD and not the school district; and no COVID-19 testing on students would be performed by the district.

However, Cummings cautioned that any of those intentions could change.

“The information above is based on information we received on June 25, 2021 from the (Michigan) Department of Health and Human Services,” he said. “Please note that the (MMDHD) may make new recommendations to schools if a communicable disease in our area is at an unsafe level. If this were to occur, Tri County Area Schools will review the new recommendations and communicate to parents any changes that may be necessary for that time period.”

Schools throughout Montcalm and Ionia counties start the school year either the week of Aug. 16 or Aug. 23. In Greenville’s case, it’s Aug. 23, and Greenville Board of Education President Norice Rasmussen reaffirmed Van Houten’s decision to wait until she could meet with officials from the MMDHD to announce a decision.

“We will have the information at the end of July, that is what is planned at this moment,” Rasmussen said.

That answer did not sit well with Allen in the audience.

“OK, so you like to wait till the last minute to let people know what’s going to happen?” Allen asked. “I mean, you guys start school at the end of August. Some of us will be pulling our kids (out of the district) if this is what’s going to happen. We would like to know ahead of time.”

Additionally, Allen asked about the status of the Michigan Blueprint for Comprehensive Student Recovery.

“That’s a document with recommendations for school districts as far as additional support services we can put in place for students,” Van Houten answered. “We will be reviewing that and have a report to the board in August. It recommends things such as counselors, nurses, bringing on additional social-emotional supports, so I do see us fulfilling some of those recommendations. We won’t be able to do all of them. The recommendation is to pick a few of them and implement them each year. That is what we plan to do and that report will be to the Board in August.”

“It sounds like you aren’t going to give anybody any information at this time, so I guess I don’t (have any other questions),” Allen said. “If you can’t give information, we can’t ask questions.”

“We’re giving you the information we have, Ms. Allen,” Rasmussen responded.

“Wonderful — which is nothing — thank you,” said Allen in frustration before logging off the Zoom portion of the meeting (which was being held in a hybrid style with the school board meeting in person).

Melissa Gekeler of Eureka Township inquired about vaccination requirements.

“MDHHS (Michigan Department of Health and Human Services) has come out with the additional money, that schools can opt to have unvaccinated students tested twice weekly,” she said. “I wanted to know what Greenville, what your stance, what your plan is for doing that.”

According to Van Houten, the school district has no intentions of testing students in that manner at this time.

“Right now we don’t have a plan to implement that,” she said. “We’ll be meeting with the health department next week, but I don’t anticipate that, unless there are other directives that come forward from the state.”

HEALTH OFFICER VIEWPOINT

The Daily News contacted Mid-Michigan District Health Department Health Officer Liz Braddock for comment on Friday.

“The CDC posted updated guidance for K-12 schools last week,” Braddock said. “The Mid-Michigan District Health Department shared this guidance with the schools and we plan to meet next week with the Montcalm ISD to discuss our recommendations. We have also set up an opportunity later this month for school administrators to meet virtually with our Medical Director Dr. Jennifer Morse to review the updated guidance and discuss what strategies will work best to lower the risk of COVID transmission at area schools.”

The Daily News also asked Ionia County Health Department Health Officer Ken Bowen for comment, but he could not be reached by press time Friday.

Daily News

Saturday, July 31, 2021

100 Acts of Kindness: Embarrassed

By [The Daily News Staff](#) | on July 31, 2021

Submitted by the Mid-Michigan District Health Department

Have you ever been in this situation?

You're ready to check out of a store or a restaurant and suddenly realize you don't have your wallet or enough money.

A Lakeview resident observed this event unfolding at a hospital cafeteria in Grand Rapids. He stood in line, waiting to check out, with the smells of warm food and coffee permeating the air. Pots and pans rattled in the kitchen. A young nurse was ahead of him at the cashier's stand. She frantically searched her uniform pockets for the money to pay for her lunch, and was obviously embarrassed. She didn't say a word, but her angst was evident, as her face flushed and she bit her lip.

The cashier looked at him with a shrug, as if to apologize for the delay. He indicated he would pay the nurse's tab. The cashier spoke quietly to the nurse, who turned back to him with a thankful smile of relief. She said, "You just made my day!"

The young nurse went back to work knowing there were kind people in the world who appreciated her efforts. The generous meal donor noted he has "a whole bunch" of health professionals in his family, and hopes others appreciate what they do as much as he does.

We salute nurses and all hospital staff working during the coronavirus pandemic.

This is one in a series of "100 Acts of Kindness" stories submitted in conjunction with the Mid-Michigan District Health Department. To submit your own Act of Kindness story, visit www.MontcalmPrevention.org and click on one of the "100 Acts of Kindness" buttons.

Gratiot County Herald

Thursday, August 5, 2021

CDC Recommends Masking in High-Risk Counties

On July 27, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) provided updated recommendations for fully vaccinated people based on new evidence related to the Delta variant, which remains the predominant variant circulating in the U.S.

According to the CDC, while breakthrough infections happen in a small number of those who are fully vaccinated, evidence suggests that fully vaccinated people who do become infected with the Delta variant can spread the virus to others.

To help reduce the risk of becoming infected or spreading COVID-19, including the Delta variant, the CDC recommends that fully vaccinated people in areas of substantial or high transmission wear a mask in public indoor settings.

At this time, Clinton, Gratiot, and Montcalm counties are not considered substantial or high transmission areas. However, the Mid-Michigan District Health Department (MMDHD) is asking members of the community to keep in mind that other counties in the State are in these high-risk categories and to take precautions as needed.

The CDC recommends fully vaccinated people in areas of substantial or high transmission:

- Should wear a mask in public indoor settings.
- May choose to mask regardless of the level of transmission, particularly if they or someone in their household is immunocompromised or at increased risk for severe disease, or if someone in their household is unvaccinated. People who are at increased risk for severe disease include older adults and those who have certain medical conditions, such as diabetes, overweight or obesity, and heart conditions.
- Should get tested if experiencing COVID-19 symptoms (fever or chills, cough, shortness of breath or difficulty breathing, fatigue, muscle or body aches, headache, new loss of taste or smell, sore throat, congestion or runny nose, nausea or vomiting, or diarrhea).
- Should get tested 3-5 days after a known exposure to someone with suspected or confirmed COVID-19 and wear a mask in public indoor settings for 14 days after exposure or until a negative test result.
- Should isolate if they have tested positive for COVID-19 in the prior 10 days or are experiencing COVID-19 symptoms.
- Should continue to wear a mask where required by laws, rules, regulations, or local guidance.

Four cases of the Delta variant have been identified in Clinton County, two cases in Montcalm County, and none in Gratiot County.

The CDC and MMDHD strongly encourage everyone to get vaccinated. Doing so helps prevent illness, hospitalization, and even death, even with the Delta variant. Those who are not fully vaccinated should also continue wearing a mask until they are fully vaccinated.

MMDHD continues to offer the COVID-19 vaccine to eligible individuals. To schedule a COVID-19 vaccination appointment, call 989-224-2195, option 5 in Clinton County, 989-875-3681, option 5 in Gratiot County, or 989-831-5237, option 5 in Montcalm County.

For more information on the COVID-19 vaccine, visit <https://www.mmdhd.org/covid-vaccine-information/>

To stay up to date on the latest information, sign up to receive important updates at <https://www.mmdhd.org/>

New Health Officer Named at MMDHD

Mid-Michigan District Health Department's Board of Health has named Liz Braddock as its new Health Officer following the retirement of Marcus Cheatham. Her first day on the job was July 5.



Braddock is no stranger to MMD- **BRADDOCK** HD, having served as the department's Environmental Health Division Director for the past four years.

Braddock's public health career spans 20 years. Prior to coming to MMDHD she spent 15 years at the Oakland County Health Department in three different roles: as a sanitarian, the supervisor of Environmental Health Services, and the Chief of Field Activities in Environmental Health Services. She also spent one year at the Berrien County Health Department as an Environmental Health Sanitarian.

Braddock is ready for the challenges that come with the job and is very excited to be serving Clinton, Gratiot, and Montcalm counties in this capacity.

See MMDHD page 5

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MMDHD *continued from page 1*

“I am very passionate about the public health field and love that I’m able to work with the commu-

nity on a daily basis,” she said. “My background in public health and my enthusiasm for public health is why

I’m ready to take on this new role. I look forward to strengthening our current relationships with community partners and building new relationships throughout the district.”

Daily News

Wednesday, August 11, 2021

CC-C board OKs COVID protocol based on health department requirements

By [Brandon Schreur](#) | on August 11, 2021



Carson City-Crystal Area Schools Superintendent John Sattler explains the difference between the Mid-Michigan District Health Department's list of COVID-related requirements and recommendations during Monday's meeting. — DN Photo | Brandon Schreur

CARSON CITY — With the start of the new school year looming, the Carson City-Crystal Area Schools Board of Education has decided on the district's COVID-19 health and safety policies.

On Monday, the school board unanimously voted to implement COVID-related requirements as provided by the Mid-Michigan District Health Department (MMDHD), which districts are legally required to follow this school year.

These requirements include requiring face masks only on buses, reporting suspected and confirmed COVID-19 cases to the health department, posting confirmed COVID-19 cases on the district's website, keeping staff and students home when sick and assisting the local health department with contact tracing.

The MMDHD also provided school districts with a list of non-legally binding recommendations for COVID protocols they could implement, should the school board choose to. That list includes encouraging or requiring the COVID-19 vaccination, universal indoor masking, physical distancing, screening testing on a weekly basis, ensuring proper ventilation, encouraging proper hand-washing and respiratory etiquette, regular cleaning and excluding non-employee close contacts from all school grounds and activities during quarantine.

The board opted not to mandate any of the MMDHD’s recommendations for the coming school year; although, the district will still practice several of them regularly and anyone visiting any of CC-C’s facilities is always welcome to wear a mask.

“Just to be clear, certainly staff or kids that feel the need to wear masks or if their parents want them to wear masks — I’d hope we’re at the point, now, where that’s enough of the norm and that’s accepted,” Board President Gregg McAlvey said. “That shouldn’t be looked down on. As school and staff, we (should be) positive to that.”

Superintendent John Sattler said he and the other six superintendents within the Montcalm Area Intermediate School District (MAISD) have been in constant communication with the MMDHD and several other parties over the past couple of weeks.

“At this time, all the superintendents in the (MAISD) are not requiring masking in schools,” Sattler told board members. “They’re only following the (requirements). They’re not adding any more to that list.”

Several board members said they’d like to see CC-C follow a similar trajectory.

“I think it makes sense to follow what’s required,” Treasurer Mark Jensen said. “We’ll do whatever the local health department requires us to do. I don’t think we should be going over and above anything they’re requiring.”

“I trust in our superintendent that he will monitor the situation in the surrounding areas, if there are upticks (in cases),” Trustee Neil Kapustka agreed. “I think we’re in a good area right now. Keep monitoring it and keep us updated, just in case something changes.”

“If anyone wants to wear a mask, they’re more than free to wear one,” Vice President Chris Ryan added. “They’re not being told that they can’t.”



Carson City-Crystal Area Schools Board of Education Treasurer Mark Jensen motions to adopt the Mid-Michigan District Health Department’s list of COVID-related requirements for the upcoming school year during Monday’s meeting. — DN Photo | Brandon Schreur

Sattler noted that if an increase in cases or an outbreak happens to occur, the district could always briefly close for a period of time for cleaning and disinfecting.

McAlvey also pointed out that, while not mandated, the district would continue to undergo regular cleaning and encourage proper hand washing and respiratory etiquette.

When asked by McAlvey what contact tracing within the district would look like this year, Sattler said the details are still being worked out.

“They’re (MMDHD) supposed to have enough staff where, supposedly, they’re going to do the contact tracing, themselves,” Sattler said. “Last year, that was not the case. Last year, they attempted to do contact tracing themselves, but they were overwhelmed and couldn’t do it.”

Sattler said that, while not set in stone, MMDHD has mentioned possibly making quarantine optional for students exposed to another person who’s positive for COVID-19.

“We’d still have to inform them,” Sattler said. “If Gregg’s child was exposed to the six-foot radius of a positive case, he has to be informed about that. He then gets to make the decision if his child can go to school or not. I thought that was odd and maybe troublesome, but that was the last thing I heard when it came to contact tracing.

“I guess, from a parent’s perspective, it’s probably better to have a choice than to be forced to do something. Last year, it seemed very punitive to force (exposed) kids to stay home for 10 days. It was a very difficult thing to do, especially when the kids were involved in after-school activities and different things.”

Sattler said the conversation is still an ongoing one between the health department and local schools. Once the exact details become finalized, the district will post a document explaining CC-C’s contact tracing guidelines for the 2021-2022 school year onto its website.

For those who don’t yet want to return to in-person learning, a fully online option is still available for fourth through 12th-grade students at CC-C. At this time, K-3 students are strongly encouraged to report to in-person learning, but Sattler said the district could still work with them on a “case-by-case basis,” should it be necessary.

Board members unanimously approved a motion made by Jensen to follow the requirements from the MMDHD and to allow Sattler to adjust the district’s protocols as needed throughout the school year based on local outbreaks or further health department orders.

Daily News

Thursday, August 12, 2021

Greenville Public Schools release COVID-19 plan for upcoming school year

By [Cory Smith](#) | on August 12, 2021



Greenville Public Schools Assistant Superintendent Matthew McCullough speaks on the subject of the school district's 2021-2022 COVID-19 plan during Monday's meeting of the Board of Education. — DN Photo | Cory Smith

GREENVILLE — Despite the upcoming school year occurring amid a growing surge in coronavirus cases, administrators at Greenville Public Schools have made it clear that at this time, there's one thing it won't be enforcing — mandates.

During Monday's Board of Education meeting, new Assistant Superintendent Matthew McCullough, speaking on behalf of Superintendent Linda Van Houten who was absent from the meeting due to a "last-minute emergency," explained to the board and roughly 35 people in attendance that the school district's 2021-2022 COVID-19 plan will be full of encouragement, but it will not mandate restrictions when it comes to face masks and vaccinations.

However, McCullough said future mandates could come into play if they are dictated by local, state or federal health departments.

Masking

In terms of face masks being worn by students and staff, as was mandated during the 2020-2021 school year, McCullough said no mask mandate will be in place when school starts on Aug. 23.

“Masking is highly recommended but not required at all grade levels for students and staff who are vaccinated — again, it is not mandated,” he said.

However, following a federal requirement from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) masking will be required on all school transportation.

As of June 10, the CDC’s order applies to planes, buses, trains and other forms of public transportation traveling into the United States or within the United States. The order specifically states that this mandate also applies to school buses.

Physical Distancing

According to McCullough, distancing of students from each other within the school will be encouraged, not mandated.

“Social distancing of three feet will be encouraged in all classrooms at the elementary level and cohorting by grade will be encouraged at the elementary level as well,” he said.

Screening and testing

Prior to the start of each school day, the school district is asking that certain students and staff be screened, with information sent to the school district electronically.



Earl Schmidt of Fairplain Township, a member of “Stand up Montcalm” (a local chapter of “Stand up Michigan”) speaks during Monday’s Greenville Public Schools Board of Education meeting in support of the board deciding through its 2021-2022 COVID-19 plan to encourage, but not mandate, face masks or vaccines aimed at preventing the spread of COVID-19 for students or staff for the upcoming school year. — DN Photo | Cory Smith

“Parents will be asked to screen students each morning and there will be a QR code available for them to do that,” McCullough said. “Staff who are not vaccinated will also be asked to screen each morning.”

McCullough said the school district will not be testing any students or staff for COVID-19.

“Testing for staff will be made available for those who are interested, but again, that will not be mandated,” he said. “Testing for athletes will also be available if they are interested, but it will not be mandated.”

Contact tracing and quarantining

McCullough said the school district will be required to report positive COVID cases to the Mid-Michigan District Health Department; however, the district will not be performing any contact tracing itself.

“Students suspected of having COVID symptoms will be isolated and will need to be sent home, per the health department,” he said.

In terms of quarantining students, only those who have received a confirmed positive COVID test will be required to be quarantined, unless the local health department determines otherwise.

“Quarantining will only be required for individuals with an identified, positive case or through the health department’s recommendations,” McCullough said. “We encourage all staff and students to stay home if they are ill or have any COVID symptoms.”

Cleaning, ventilation and visitors

McCullough said the school district will perform routine cleaning and sanitizing to maintain a healthy learning environment throughout school buildings.

Classroom desks will be cleaned on a daily basis, fogging will be initiated in classrooms that have an identified positive COVID case, fogging will continue to take place on all buses on a daily basis and the school district will promote handwashing throughout the school day.



About 35 people attended Monday's meeting of the Greenville Public Schools Board of Education, of which about half showed support for "Stand up Montcalm" (a local chapter of "Stand up Michigan") offering support of the board's decision on the district's 2021-2022 COVID-19 plan to encourage, but not mandate, face masks or vaccines aimed at preventing the spread of COVID-19 for students or staff for the upcoming school year. — DN Photo | Cory Smith

Additionally, increased ventilation and airflow will continue to be implemented throughout the school district.

Visitors will be welcomed into school buildings throughout the district and are encouraged to be vaccinated, but vaccinations will not be mandated.

Vaccinations

In terms of vaccinations, McCullough made it clear that COVID-19 vaccinations will not be mandated for either students or staff.

"Vaccinations will also be encouraged but are not required," he said.

Board Trustee Charlie Mahar asked to what extent the district would be encouraging vaccinations.

"You say 'encouraged' ... that's not going to be something that's done daily or weekly — we're not going to be talking to children about vaccinations?" he asked.

"It is highly encouraged, just as others have stated," McCullough responded.

McCullough again noted that the recommendations from the health department are subject to change at any time.

"There's the Delta (COVID) variant right now," he said. "We're following all of the health department guidelines, and right now, the health department highly recommends it (encouraging) so we are following their lead."

"I think what I mean is, we're not going to be having teachers pulling students aside, telling them they (should be vaccinated)," Mahar said. "When we say we're encouraging the vaccine, we're not going to be doing that individually with children."

"No, it's not mandated," McCullough responded. "It's just making (the information) available."

Public comment

Prior to McCullough's explaining of the district's COVID-19 plan, public comment was made available.

About half of those in attendance indicated they were members of "Stand up Montcalm," a local chapter of "Stand up Michigan," an anti-lockdown group formed in April 2020 that aims to "reclaim and defend the rights and liberties of 'We The People of Michigan,'" per the organization's website.

Speaking on behalf of the Montcalm County chapter, Earl Schmidt of Fairplain Township introduced the organization to the board, offering any assistance it may want moving forward.

"I want to express our appreciation for the stance the school board has taken on not mandating mandatory vaccines, not masking our kids," he said. "I remember when I was a kid going to school, I was always kind of a class clown and I just can't imagine not being able to see my friends and their smiling faces, that interaction."

Despite what happens with COVID-19 in the future, Schmidt asked the board to remain committed to the current stances issued by district's COVID-19 plan at the meeting.

“I know there's a lot of things up in the air with the Delta variant and all these things out there, but I just hope you stick to your guns and we can have a great year and just continue to do school the way it's meant to be done and to nurture our kids,” he said. “We would like to be an extension and help you guys any way we can. We're not here to criticize. Some school boards that I've seen, they are pretty hostile, so it was nice to be met at the door today. You've all been really nice and helpful. If there's anything we can do to help and support, let us know.”

Shannon Lowry of Montcalm Township said if her daughter is required to wear a mask in a classroom setting, she won't support the decision.

“If masks are a choice, that's understandable, but for a mom like me, I don't want to see (my daughter) in one,” she said. “Last year when they (students) started going online, I was like ‘yeah, this is awesome, I get to hang out with my kid all day.’ Then when the teacher went on a group meeting with the whole class, I realized how devastating this was to these kids. There were kids who were so depressed, so sad and it just broke my heart.”

Lowry said she believes face masks are more harmful than helpful to the students in terms of protection from COVID-19.

“These masks have more germs in them and more cooties in them than COVID does,” she alleged. “We all understand you guys (Board of Education) are in a rough spot, but so are we. I won't send my daughter to school in a mask all day long. I love this school, I'm happy we moved here, but I'm not going to put her in a mask all day. It makes her more sick.”

According to the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, “masks may help prevent people who have COVID-19 from spreading the virus to others ... wearing a face mask may limit exposure to respiratory droplets and large particles and may help prevent people who have COVID-19 from spreading the virus.”

While the CDC reports that cloth and surgical masks do not protect a wearer from airborne infection, it reports that cloth and surgical masks are not entirely ineffective because they prevent the wearer from transmitting infection to others through droplets. In addition, the CDC reports that people who wear these masks are in little to no danger of breathing in too much carbon dioxide.

However, cloth masks also get dirty easily, which is why both Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) and CDC recommend regular washing of such face masks.

Currently, due to the Delta variant of COVID-19, the CDC recommends — but does not mandate — universal indoor masking by all students (age 2 and older), staff, teachers, and visitors to K-12 schools, regardless of vaccination status.

Daily News

Thursday, August 12, 2021

Sheridan discharges treated wastewater early

By [Karen Bota](#) | on August 12, 2021

SHERIDAN — A construction project at the wastewater treatment plant lagoons has caused an early discharge of treated water in Sheridan.

The village has a permit from the Michigan Environment, Great Lakes & Energy (EGLE) that allows discharge on a biannual basis — one in the spring from March through May, and the other in the fall from October through December — so as “not to disrupt the flow of the ecosystem,” according to Village Superintendent Ed Lingeman.

However, the discharge was needed now due to repairs and improvements being made at the lagoon.

“Due to construction timelines, we had to transfer water and do a discharge,” Lingeman explained, adding that he has completed all required testing for seven parameters ensuring water quality, and that he will continue to test.

“It is treated water but not ‘finished,’ because it’s not in the discharge period,” Lingeman added. “We have to do it now, and the criteria has been met to do that. It’s a technicality.”

Because the discharge is outside of the permit period, Lingeman was required to notify EGLE, the Mid-Michigan District Health Department and the Daily News.

Treated water is discharged into the Barkham & Summers Drain, which flows into the Prairie Creek and then the Grand River through tributaries as other drains in the county do, he said.

Lingeman emphasized that the discharge is not due to operator error or failure.

“It’s just not designed to carry that storage capacity in one cell,” he said.

Discharge began Wednesday and will be completed by Monday afternoon.

Daily News

Friday, August 13, 2021

Montcalm Community College ‘closely monitoring’ COVID rates

No mask or vaccine mandates in place at this time for college

By [Cory Smith](#) | on August 13, 2021

SIDNEY TOWNSHIP — In delivering a report to the Montcalm Community College Board of Trustees on Tuesday morning, MCC President Stacy Young spoke with both a sense of caution and optimism when looking ahead to the upcoming fall semester.



Montcalm Community College President Stacy Young, left, provides an update regarding COVID-19 and the start of the college’s upcoming fall semester during Tuesday’s meeting of the MCC Board of Trustees. — DN Photo | Cory Smith

Having previously met with officials from the Mid-Michigan District Health Department regarding the Delta variant of COVID-19, Young said she is aiming to keep the college grounds safe for students and faculty.

“We are closely monitoring the COVID rates and we’ve started meeting with the health department again,” she said. “Last week we were around 2.67% for the positivity rate and today we’re up to 6.5%.”

Young said for the time being the college won’t be mandating anything regarding face masks or vaccines for the fall semester, which starts Aug. 23.

“We ask people that are vaccinated to be mask-free and those that aren’t to mask up, but we aren’t enforcing it,” she said.

If the situation worsens and a decision is made for masks to be worn, Young said she doesn’t believe the college will differentiate between those who are vaccinated or not.

“Our executive team, we are talking about this almost daily,” she said. “We really don’t want to have to go to masking. If we do, if we do have to mask, if rates move us up into higher categories, we would ask everyone to mask up.

“We would hope to ask faculty not to mask up as long as everyone else in the classroom is masked,” she added. “I just feel like, for our faculty, that’s exhausting, having to speak through that mask throughout the entire class period.”

Young said the college will be encouraging faculty, students and visitors of the college to become vaccinated against COVID.



Members of the Montcalm Community College Board of Trustees, meeting Tuesday on the college’s Sidney campus, discussed the start of the college’s upcoming fall semester (Aug. 23) and how it will look with COVID-19 continuing to linger as cases climb locally. — DN Photo | Cory Smith

“The other thing we’re doing, during Welcome Week, we’re partnering with United Way and vaccines will be available on campus for those who want it,” she said. “So we are closely monitoring this, but we are trying to take it one step, one day, one hour at a time. Of course, it’s going to get higher (COVID positivity rate) right in time for school to start.”

As of Wednesday, the state of Michigan’s coronavirus dashboard reported that 44.4% of residents in Montcalm County are vaccinated against COVID (children 12 and younger cannot yet receive a vaccine). That makes Montcalm County one of 23 of the state’s 83 counties that have failed to reach a 50% vaccination rate.

As a state, Michigan sits at a vaccination rate of 59%, a rate still below Gov. Gretchen Whitmer and President Joe Biden's goal of 70%.

With other community colleges in the state, such as Lansing Community College, having decided to mandate masking of students and faculty and several universities implementing a requirement to be vaccinated, Board Trustee Kurt Peterson asked if such a fate could be in store for MCC.

"Is there any discussion about mandating vaccines?" he asked. "There's a lot of universities that have already done it."

"We are not planning to mandate it," Young responded. "We are going to work to encourage. I think the difference with universities is the residence halls, which we don't have."

MCC Vice President for Administrative Services Connie Stewart said the only students who may be mandated to wear a mask or have a vaccination would be nursing students who work at hospitals.

"Our nursing students who are required to do nursing clinics, if that hospital has a mandate, they will be required to be vaccinated," she said. "Right now, they are the only students in that category."

On that note, Peterson expressed how he personally feels about people being vaccinated against COVID-19.

"I think it should be mandated that anybody that's not vaccinated should have to write a letter to their loved ones as to why they didn't care enough to get it done," he said. "My brother-in-law was in the ICU, and luckily he made it out, but a large percentage that make it to that point don't recover. Now he's toting around an oxygen tank and the whole shebang with major damage to his lungs."

"It's a scary, scary time," Young responded, adding that she feels the college will be well equipped to continue operating safely for students and staff despite any potential increase in COVID cases.

"Last year we were really blessed because we did not have a lot of COVID-19 cases compared to other institutions," she said. "I think that's a testament to the protocols we had in place."

MCC Vice President of Academic Affairs Rob Spohr noted that several of those protocols remain in place.

"All of our classrooms are socially distanced, we've kept that in the schedule for the fall," he said. "We also have live online sessions, so we don't have to change anything there."

Young said while the Mid-Michigan District Health Department is recommending 3 feet of distance between people in group settings, the college will be utilizing a measurement of 6 feet as it did last year.

"We're making sure everything is what we call 'COVID friendly,'" she said. "When looking at what we did last year, some colleges stopped everything — they had to with all the COVID stuff — and I'm really proud of us because we didn't have to. Our foundation had a record year with fundraising, our enrollment is up for the upcoming fall semester, our academics have stayed high and we were able to do renovations that we weren't able to do for 15 years here — all during COVID. It's been really hard, there's been a lot of changes, but we have done a lot of huge things and all of this with COVID sitting on top of us the whole time."

As of Tuesday, MCC had a headcount of 1,414 students registered for the fall semester. On that same date last year, MCC had 1,092 students registered, meaning the school is currently up about 30% in student headcount.

If that trend holds into the start of the fall semester, MCC could see its enrollment increase beyond 1,700 students. That figure would be an increase of 300-plus students from the final enrollment of 1,415 students in the fall of last year.

Daily News

Monday, August 16, 2021

100 Acts of Kindness: Fifth-grade pen pals

By [The Daily News Staff](#) | on August 15, 2021

Submitted by the Mid-Michigan District Health Department

In the age of Zoom meetings, texts and emails, many people still appreciate a “snail mail” card or letter. Residents in nursing home facilities in the Ionia and Montcalm area were treated to cheerful cards that contained a poem, colorful artwork and a personal letter from a student, inviting them to be their pen pal.

In response to the 100 Acts of Kindness initiative a supervisor from the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services, reached out to her son’s classroom teacher to see if they would be interested in participating.

A fifth-grade classroom at Central Montcalm Upper Elementary School assisted in creating cards for individuals in long-term care facilities. With their teacher’s help and direction, they made cards which included a poem, original art and a letter from each student.

Perhaps best of all, the students also invited the recipient to be their pen pal. During the COVID-19 pandemic, isolation has been a problem for everyone, but especially those in long-term care. Having an additional means of communication brings joy to these folks. The students have a new friend as well.

A number of recent articles show that when we share kindness with each other, the people involved experience better health and well-being. The teacher, parent, students and residents all benefit from this simple, but ongoing, act of kindness and connection.

This is one in a series of “100 Acts of Kindness” stories submitted in conjunction with the Mid-Michigan District Health Department. To submit your own Act of Kindness story, visit www.MontcalmPrevention.org and click on one of the “100 Acts of Kindness” buttons.

Daily News

Monday, August 16, 2021

At Michigan lakes, check water for algae before diving in

By [The Daily News Staff](#) | on August 16, 2021

Submitted by the Mid-Michigan District Health Department

When summer heats up in Michigan, many people flock to one of the state's 11,000 inland lakes or numerous rivers to cool off. If you're planning a fun day of rest and relaxation on the water, just make sure you look for algae before you dive in.

Algae are a large group of naturally occurring plant-like organisms found in water. Dense populations of algae are called a bloom. Some blooms are harmless, but some produce toxins, which can be poisonous to humans, animals, and aquatic life.

When conditions are right, these organisms can rapidly increase to form cyanobacteria blooms, or harmful algal blooms. A bloom can occur when the water temperature is warm, conditions are calm, and the water has a high level of nutrients, like phosphorus and nitrogen. Excess nutrients can come from pollution such as lawn and farm fertilizers, animal manure, storm water runoff, sewage treatment plant discharges, and malfunctioning septic tanks. Invasive zebra and quagga mussels help make water conditions right for harmful algal blooms.

Residents should be cautious of and avoid direct contact with water that might have an algal bloom. Blooms can take on many appearances. They can be different colors, can look foamy or scummy, look like a mat on the surface of the water, look like spilled paint, have a green sheen to it, or even look clumpy. To see examples of what an algal bloom looks like, visit mmdhd.org/recreational-water/ and click on "Harmful Algal Bloom Picture Guide." It's difficult to tell by looking at a bloom if it is harmful or not, so when in doubt, keep yourself and animals out of the water.

If you think you may have found an algal bloom, you can report it to the Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes & Energy (EGLE) by emailing AlgaeBloom@michigan.gov (pictures are encouraged) or by calling 1-800-662-9278.

You should also take the following actions if you think you have found a harmful algal bloom:

- Obey posted signs for public health advisories and/or beach closings.
- Do not let people, pets, or livestock in the water or near the shore in affected areas.
- Do not let people, pets or livestock drink untreated surface water, especially if an algal bloom is present.
- Always rinse off people and pets after contact with any lake water.
- Do not water lawns or gardens with impacted water.

- Do not have direct contact with mussels from impacted areas.
- Limit or avoid eating fish from impacted areas. If fish are consumed, eat only the filets, remove the guts and the liver and rinse filets in clean drinking water. Always follow the State's Eat Safe Fish Guidelines (michigan.gov/eatsafefish) even if a water body appears clear of algae.

• Report unpleasant tastes or smells in your drinking water to the local water utility. Breathing in or swallowing water containing harmful algal blooms and their toxins may cause the following symptoms in people: diarrhea, vomiting, stomach pain, headache, weakness, numbness, tingly fingers, dizziness, difficulty breathing, asthma-like symptoms, runny eyes and nose, allergic reactions, sore throat, headache, and allergic reactions. Skin contact can cause rashes, blisters, or hives. If you or a loved one experiences any of these symptoms after contact with water that may have a harmful algal bloom, call your doctor right away.

Animals, especially dogs, can become ill or die after contact with a harmful algal bloom. Signs of illness include vomiting, diarrhea, staggered walking, and convulsions. If your pet or livestock animal becomes sick after contact with water that may have a harmful algal bloom, contact your veterinarian right away.

To help prevent harmful algal blooms, Michiganders can:

- Use phosphate-free detergents
- Dispose of pet waste properly
- Apply fertilizer only when necessary and applying the recommended amount according to label instructions. A buffer should be left when applying fertilizer near a lake or stream.

For more information, visit michigan.gov/habs.

Gratiot County Herald

Thursday, August 19, 2021

Kinnee added that blooms can take on many appearances. "They can be different colors, can look foamy or scummy, look like a mat on the surface of the water, look like spilled paint, have a green sheen to it, or even look clumpy."

MMDHD signage is posted around the lake warning visitors and their pets stay clear of the bloom. Little said the health department will continue to monitor the situation until the bloom naturally dissipates, and that a chemical treatment has not been a recommendation.

"There is no timeline at this point," he said. "Once the bloom has dissipated and the results are clear, the beaches will be reopened."

This is Little's first public health-related issue at the lake since he became director of the county parks in 2010. "We have never had an algae bloom closure or any other closure," he said. Kinnee said that breathing in or swallowing water containing harmful algal blooms and their toxins may cause diarrhea, vomiting, stomach pain, headache, weakness, numbness, tingly fingers, dizziness, difficulty breathing, asthma-like symptoms, runny eyes and nose, allergic reactions, sore throat, headache, and allergic reactions.

Skin contact can cause rashes, blisters, or hives.

"If you or a loved one experiences any of these symptoms after contact with water that may have a harmful algal bloom, call your doctor right away," she said.

Animals, especially dogs, can also become ill or die after contact with a harmful algal bloom. Signs of illness include vomiting, diarrhea, staggered walking and convulsions.

Information shared to The Herald's Facebook page about the algal bloom prompted a comment from a park visitor who let their dog swim in the water for two days before being informed by a ranger of the presence of the harmful toxins.

"She broke out in terrible hives that turned into an infection," the commenter said about their dog. "She is on antibiotics and unfortunately losing her hair where she had the hives. Do not take your dog into the water there!"

As August constitutes the end of the season for the county parks, Little said it's hard to tell if the closure of the lake has impacted park attendance.