



November 11, 2020

Dear Orenda Public Charter School Staff and Families,

We had a great start to the school year, even though it was vastly different than any other school year. I am continually impressed with the dedication of our staff to ensure the safety of our students while still providing high-quality instruction. Our families have also been instrumental in reducing the spread of COVID in our schools by following the protocols in our school start plan. This has resulted in very few on-campus COVID cases with minimal disruption to student learning.

As we approach the holiday season, I wanted to pass on travel guidance from our local health authorities and the CDC. Also included in this letter is new guidance regarding remote instruction for struggling students, resources for free COVID testing, December End-of-Course testing, and some reminders to continue to keep everyone safe.

NEW – Holiday Travel: Local health authorities and the CDC recommend the best way to protect yourself and your loved ones from COVID is to avoid all non-essential travel and stay home during the holidays. You absolutely should not travel if you or anyone in your household is sick, if you or anyone in your household has been diagnosed with COVID (even if you do not have symptoms) or if you or anyone in your household has been around someone with confirmed or suspected COVID.

We understand the importance of connecting with family so if you do choose to travel, please remember the following to remain as safe as possible:

- Remain 6 feet or more from others who are not from your household as much as possible
- Wash your hands or use hand sanitizer
- Wear a face covering that keeps your nose and mouth covered
- Self-monitor for any COVID symptoms

One of the riskiest activities is staying with family or friends, especially in an area of high COVID activity, as people are much more likely to feel “safe” and let down their guard in terms of wearing masks and social distancing, and hand hygiene, sharing meals, as well as frequent cleaning of contact surfaces. In addition, when visiting family, there is a higher likelihood of several family groups from different households gathering together, which significantly increases risk of exposure.

For more detailed information on holiday travel, please visit:

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/travelers/travel-during-covid19.html>

After travel, it is critical to monitor for any possible COVID infection. If you do develop symptoms or came in contact with someone during your travels who has



COVID or symptoms that may be COVID, you should notify your campus administrator, keep your student home from school, and contact your physician.

NEW – Remote Learning for Struggling Students: The Texas Education Agency released new guidance on November 5th for remote students who are at significant risk of severe learning loss due to the student’s attendance and/or academic performance. Remote learning can be discontinued by the school for students who meet one or both of the following criteria:

- Class average below a 70 in at least one class
- 3 or more unexcused absences in a grading period

School districts must provide notice to the student’s parents at least two weeks before requiring the student to come on campus, provide opportunity for appeal for medical or other reasons, and hold a meeting (which can be virtual) if required by the appeal.

Campus administrators will be reviewing student progress and contacting families in the next few weeks for students who are at significant risk for learning loss.

NEW – Local Free COVID Testing: Many local communities have free COVID testing available. Below are several resources for staff and families to access free COVID testing. Individuals typically receive results within 24 hours.

- Williamson County: <http://www.wcchd.org/COVID-19/testing.php>
- Llano County: <https://www.hillcountrydirectcare.com/> (Llano County Health Department)
- Statewide Testing Locator (not all testing sites are free): <https://www.covidtest.tdem.texas.gov/>

NEW – High School End-of-Course Test: December End-of-Course STAAR tests are **December 8-18** for any student who needs to retake from a prior year or who completed Biology, Algebra I, English I, English II, or US History courses this fall. Students are required to test **on campus** in a staff-proctored session. Campus administrators will communicate the specific dates, times, and other details to students who need to test.

Reminder – Parent Notification to School: If your student has COVID symptoms, is lab-confirmed with COVID, or close contact with an individual who is lab-confirmed with COVID, parents need to email the campus administrator and keep their child home from school. Students can still participate in remote instruction. When emailing the campus administrator, please include the date symptoms first appeared, date of lab-confirmed test, and/or last date of close contact with a lab-confirmed case.



Reminder – How Long to Stay Home due to COVID:

Confirmed COVID or COVID Symptoms (10 Days)

Any staff or students who themselves either: (a) are test-confirmed to have COVID; or (b) experience the symptoms of COVID must stay at home throughout the infection period, and cannot return to campus until the below conditions for campus re-entry have been met:

- In the case of an individual who is **symptomatic** and is diagnosed with COVID, the individual may return to school when all three of the following criteria are met:
 - At least one day (24 hours) has passed since recovery (resolution of fever without the use of fever-reducing medications);
 - The individual has improvement in symptoms (e.g., cough, shortness of breath); and
 - At least **ten days** have passed since symptoms first appeared.
- In the case of an individual that is **asymptomatic** but has received a positive COVID test result, the individual may not return to the campus until **ten days** have passed since a positive test.
- In the case of an individual who has **symptoms** that could be COVID and who is not evaluated by a medical professional or tested for COVID, such individual is assumed to have COVID, and the individual may not return to the campus until the individual has completed the same three-step set of criteria listed above.
- If the individual has **symptoms** that could be COVID and wants to return to school before completing the above stay at home period, the individual must either (a) obtain a medical professional's note clearing the individual for return based on an alternative diagnosis, though for health privacy reasons the note does not need to indicate what the alternative diagnosis is, or (b) obtain an acute infection test (at a physician's office, approved testing location, or other site) that comes back negative for COVID.

Close Contact (14 days)

"Close contact" with an individual who is test-confirmed to have COVID-19 is defined as:

- being directly exposed to infectious secretions (e.g., being coughed on); OR
- Being within 6 feet for a total of approximately 15 minutes throughout the course of a day; however, additional factors like case/contact masking (i.e., both the infectious individual and the potential close contact have been consistently and properly masked), ventilation, presence of dividers, and case symptomology may affect this determination.

Individuals who are determined to be a "close contact" are required to stay home for **14 days** from the date of last contact with the test-confirmed individual.

Reminder – Importance of Face Coverings: I have yet to meet anyone who likes wearing masks or face coverings, myself included, but this is one of the



important ways to protect yourself and minimize the spread of the virus to others. Local county health department data supports that wearing face coverings decreases the spread of the virus between individuals and is one of the factors considered when determining close contact. Keep up the good work of wearing your face covering to reduce the spread of COVID.

Reminder – Attendance: Students must attend at least 90% of their daily classes to get credit for and/or be promoted to the next grade. Students who are not physically present on-campus and do not engage remotely from 12 am - 11:59 pm on that day will be counted “absent” for that day. The excused absence policy in the Parent-Student Handbook applies to both on-campus and remote learning. Students who do not meet one of the excused absence reasons will be marked “unexcused”. Only students with excused absences are allowed to make up work.

Reminder – School Start Plan: Our 2020-21 School Start Plan is found [here](#). This is a great document to reference with COVID questions.

As I reflect on this season of gratitude, I am thankful for our amazing teachers who have learned to teach in new ways to students both in-person and remotely. I am thankful for our families who have supported and worked alongside us during COVID to continue student learning. I am thankful for our campus support staff, district staff, and administrators who have worked many hours to continue operations for our students, staff, and families. We have an amazing Orenda Charter School community. Stay safe and well during this holiday season!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads 'Carla Silber'. The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Carla Silber
Superintendent/COO
Orenda Public Charter School District