

September 24, 2021

I have two updates to share this week. First, Niche.com is a national brand that helps connect colleges and PreK - 12 schools with students and families. They collect and sort multiple sources of data to rank schools and school districts in each state. Their latest rankings were released this week and I am proud to report they ranked [Auburn-Washburn](#) as the fifth best school district in Kansas. Congratulations to our students, staff, and families! The school districts ranking in front of Auburn-Washburn were: 1) Blue Valley, 2) DeSoto, 3) West Elk, and 4) Olathe.

Second, here is this week's update on internal Auburn-Washburn numbers.

This week's Shawnee County indicator rating of community spread remained in "substantial" for the fourth consecutive week. The weekly number of positive cases dropped this week for the fourth consecutive week.

In Auburn-Washburn from September 17 - 23, the number of confirmed student positive COVID-19 cases was 12 compared to 21 last week. The number of "in-school close contacts" went from 12 last week to 11 this week and the number of "out of school close contacts" decreased from 26 last week to 22 this week. This is the third consecutive week that student quarantine numbers decreased.

The most current [Auburn-Washburn Scorecard](#) will be posted on our [website](#) each week on Friday.

Thanks, and have a great weekend!

Scott

Dr. Scott McWilliams
Superintendent of Schools

September 17, 2021

I have two updates to share this week. First, the National Merit Scholarship Program released names this week of top performing students from the Class of 2022 from each state. We are excited to announce that nine WRHS students made the list due to stellar performance on the PSAT. Congratulations to the following students; very impressive work!

National Merit Semifinalists for performing in the top 1% in Kansas:

- Karyna Cheung
- Victoria Wagner
- Om Watson

National Merit Commended Scholars for performing in the Top 5% in the Nation:

- Donna Jalosjos
- Rishiraj Pandya
- Zachary Willingham

In addition, the College Board started a recognition program recognizing top national performers.

- African American Program Scholar: Gorata MacKenzie
- Hispanic Program Scholar: Landen Lobatos-Dick
- Hispanic Program Scholar: Alex Sanderson
- Indigenous Program Scholar: Victoria Wagner

Second, here is this week's update on internal Auburn-Washburn numbers.

This week's Shawnee County indicator rating of community spread remained in "substantial" for the third consecutive week. The weekly number of positive cases dropped this week for the third consecutive week.

In Auburn-Washburn from September 10 - 16, the number of confirmed student positive COVID-19 cases was 21 this week which is the exact same as last week. The number of "in-school close contacts" decreased from 26 last week to 12 this week and the number of "out of school close contacts" decreased from 72 last week to 26 this week. This is the second consecutive week that student quarantine numbers decreased.

The most current [Auburn-Washburn Scorecard](#) will be posted on our [website](#) each week on Friday.

Have a nice weekend,
Scott

Dr. Scott McWilliams
Superintendent of Schools

September 10, 2021

Seven years ago I attended my first home WRHS football game with my wife and three daughters. Game time was 7:00 pm and we arrived in the stadium around 6:45 pm. My wife, Heather, said, "Darn it, there are no seats left!". I shouted with excitement, "Yes! This place is packed." I remember being so impressed by the turn-out, the support shown to all students performing and competing (football, band, cheer, dance, flags, Air Force JROTC), and the overall genuine sense of community.

Since March 2020, because of COVID-19, some school-sponsored events had to be canceled, others were postponed or modified, but that is not the case this school year. Let's pull together as a school community this year and take full advantage of the many opportunities that our students participate in throughout the year. Tonight, for example, nearly 600 students will be engaged in activities that they truly enjoy doing. In addition to the normal "Friday night lights" experience, our WRMS band will perform with the WRHS band, nearly 200 participants from the Lil' Blues Cheer Clinic will perform with the WRHS cheer team, orchestra students and parents will be working the concession stand for PTO, and our football team, Air Force JROTC, and Student Council have worked together to organize a "stock the WRHS pantry" donation drive at tonight's game. What an exciting night for Auburn-Washburn!

Next week on Friday night, September 17, the Auburn-Washburn Public Schools Foundation is hosting a MOVIE NIGHT at the WRHS football stadium. This is a family event for all ages. Gates open at 7:00 pm, the WRHS drumline will be the preshow entertainment, and the movie, Night at the Museum, will be displayed on a large screen at 7:45 pm. For more details, [please click here](#).

The environment we are in is not as good as we want it to be yet, but, it is good enough to enjoy these outdoor events. If you are able to attend either of these Friday night activities, thank you for supporting our students and the Auburn-Washburn Public Schools Foundation!

Each Friday I provide an update on internal Auburn-Washburn numbers. Here is this week's update.

This week's Shawnee County indicator rating of community spread remained "substantial" for the second consecutive week.

In Auburn-Washburn from September 3 - 9, the number of confirmed student positive COVID-19 cases dropped from 87 last week to 21 this week. The number of students in quarantine due to in-school close contact dropped from 80 last week to 26 this week. The number of students in quarantine due to out of school close contact dropped from 102 last week to 72 this week. This is the first week in which each number tracked decreased from the previous week. The most current [Auburn-Washburn Scorecard](#) will be posted on our website each week on Friday.

To all students performing and competing tonight, good luck, and Go Jr. Blues!

Scott

Dr. Scott McWilliams
Superintendent of Schools

September 3, 2021

I want to begin this message by wishing you and your family a wonderful Labor Day weekend. Enjoy a well-deserved extended holiday weekend!

Each Friday I will provide an update on internal Auburn-Washburn numbers. Here is this week's update.

This week's Shawnee County indicator rating of community spread moved from "high" to "substantial." The weekly number of positive cases dropped this week for the first time in ten weeks. That is great news!

You will notice a "new look" Auburn-Washburn Scorecard this week. There is value in reporting our weekly data in a detailed, factual, and sustainable way. That is the reason for the new look.

In Auburn-Washburn from August 27 - September 2, the number of confirmed student positive COVID-19 cases was 87 and the number of students in quarantine was 182. The number of student positive cases continues to increase each week but the number of students in quarantine decreased by 100 this week. Of those 182 students in quarantine, 80 of them were due to "in-school close contact" and 102 were due to "out of school contact." We are learning the "why" for in-school close contacts and will work to reduce that number moving forward.

Starting this week, we reported student quarantine data by "in-school close contact" and "out of school contact" but we did not track it that way for the first two weeks of school. In an effort to use student quarantine data from the first two weeks in this new format, we applied the percentage of "in-school close contact" and "out of school contact" from this week to the first two weeks of school. So, 44% of students in quarantine this week was due to "in-school close contact" and 56% was due to "out of school contact". From the first two weeks of school, there were 445 students in quarantine. Of those 445 students in quarantine, we placed 44%, or 195, into the running total "in-school close contact" number and we placed 56%, or 250, into the running total "out of school contact" number. Applying this week's percentage is not exact but should be close. Each week moving forward it will be reported using exact numbers so the potentially slight margin of error from the first two weeks will not be significant over time.

The most current [Auburn-Washburn Scorecard](#) will be posted on our [website](#) each week on Friday. It is important for all to remain informed on our internal numbers as we progress through the school year.

Thanks, and again, have an enjoyable holiday weekend!

Scott

Dr. Scott McWilliams
Superintendent of Schools

August 27, 2021

Each Friday I will provide an update on internal Auburn-Washburn COVID-19 numbers. Here is this week's update.

In Shawnee County, community transmission is high. Of those tested in Shawnee County from August 15 - 21, the positivity rate was above 15% in age groups 5-10 and 11-13 and above 20% in age group 14-17. County data is important due to the fact that it impacts our internal numbers.

In Auburn-Washburn from August 19 - 26, the number of confirmed student positive COVID-19 cases was 57 and the number of students in quarantine was 282. Starting next week, we will break down the student quarantine number by "in-school close contact" vs "out of school close contact." We have more control over "in-school close contact" due to mitigation strategies and we must be diligent about reducing the "in-school close contact" number each week. We have little control over "out of school close contact."

To ensure clarity, the term close contact is used to determine when quarantine is required. A student must quarantine when he or she is within six-feet of a positive COVID-19 case for 10-minutes or more throughout the entirety of one school day. There are two school specific quarantine exemptions for students when masks are properly worn. Those exemptions are:

1. Elementary and middle school students in the classroom or during recess/gym and both individuals wore their masks correctly for the entire duration of the close contact.
2. High school students in the classroom or during gym/weightlifting and both individuals were spaced 3-feet apart and wore their masks correctly for the entire duration of the close contact.

While feedback on masks in schools is mixed, we have a much better chance of keeping students in school by wearing masks indoors at this time. Tracking "in-school close contact" numbers over the next couple of weeks will be insightful data to review.

The most current [Auburn-Washburn Scorecard](#) will be posted on our [website](#) each week on Friday. It is important for all to remain informed on our internal numbers as we progress through the school year.

Thanks,
Scott

Dr. Scott McWilliams
Superintendent of Schools

August 25, 2021

The purpose of this email to staff and parents is to keep you updated on three items. I owe it to you to be direct and up front when faced with a challenge, and this first item is extremely challenging. For many years now, our Transportation Team has overcome issues related to a national bus driver shortage. As a complement to our team, they have always found a way to make things work. The bus driver shortage has worsened significantly due to COVID-19. Simply stated, we do not have enough drivers. Numerous recruitment strategies have been tried over the years but none have provided the number of drivers needed. Today, moving into our afternoon routes, we are short nearly 20 drivers. When this occurs, drivers are selected to drive two or three routes after they complete their regularly scheduled route. The good news is bus riders are assured a safe bus ride home, but of course, the bad news is there is not a bus ready for each bus rider at the end of the school day and buses are delayed returning students home. If you are able to transport your student or create a carpool for several students, that would be a tremendous help and a way to ensure your student is on time. We remain committed to transporting students to and from school, but unless we can secure additional drivers, delays will be common. If you wish to make changes to your school transportation preferences, please email transportation@usd437.net or call 339-4050.

Also, we are in communication with the company that hosts [Ride 360](#). They are troubleshooting on their end to ensure we, as end users, are able to rely on Ride 360 as a reliable source. They are aware of our frustration.

Second, updates have been made to the [Approach to the 2021-22 School](#) year document posted on the [district website](#). Please note the following updates:

- On page 1, COVID-19 symptoms have been added to the "Staying Home When Sick" section.
- On page 2, the first sentence in the "Masks in Schools" section now reads, "Masks are required for all students, staff, and visitors when inside any Auburn-Washburn facility."
- On page 2, the first sentence in the "Physical Distancing" section now reads, "Spaces will be arranged to distance students as much as possible." That section also contains language on quarantine exemptions for specific school scenarios.
- On page 7, a new section titled "Approach to Quarantine Learning" was added.

Third, our application for the Test to Learn / Test to Play program was approved and we received some, but not all, of our testing materials. The need for this program reduces substantially when all students are wearing masks. We will continue to make this program operational so it will be ready to use, as needed, later in the year.

Thanks,
Scott

Dr. Scott McWilliams
Superintendent of Schools

August 22, 2021

At the special Auburn-Washburn Board of Education meeting on Sunday, August 22, the steps listed below were adopted. Additional information will be shared early this week.

Effective immediately, masks are required for all students, staff, and visitors when inside any Auburn-Washburn facility. Spaces will be arranged to distance students as much as possible. Mask exceptions signed by a qualified, licensed medical doctor for students and staff will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis. Mask exceptions for qualified educational purposes during a designated time of the school day will also be reviewed on a case-by-case basis. These requirements will be evaluated at the first Board of Education meeting of November 2021.

August 20, 2021

As students returned to school last week on Thursday, it was clear that thoughts differed on what, if any, mitigation strategies should be in place during the school day. Even with thoughts differing on how to proceed, the common theme was to keep students and staff safely in school every day this year. For those of you that have shared thoughts with me or to the Board of Education, thank you. Parent engagement has been key to our success over the years and the feedback received has been appreciated.

I have shared that as we moved into this school year we will lean on internal Auburn-Washburn data to guide decision making on mitigation strategies. Our first [Auburn-Washburn Scorecard](#) documents student and staff positive COVID-19 cases and quarantine numbers from August 12 through August 19 at 2:00 pm. Please note the following four points about this week's data:

- Of the 47 student COVID-19 cases and the 163 students in quarantine, some of them were a result of close contacts to a positive case at the end of summer before school started on August 12. These students were not able to start school on August 12 but they are reported due to the fact that they are Auburn-Washburn students enrolled this year and the purpose of the Scorecard is to document internal student and staff data as accurately as possible.
- The Shawnee County Scorecard had been in the orange color band for the previous three weeks but it has moved to the red color band this week. Their scorecard is one indicator of COVID-19 spread in Shawnee County.
- For reference, last year's Auburn-Washburn Scorecard documented 38 student COVID-19 cases on November 12 and 56 cases were documented on November 19. This year, our student COVID-19 number is comparable to that after our first week of school.

- Our staff numbers have not created staffing concerns but we have seen two “breakthrough” cases among staff. A breakthrough case is when a fully vaccinated individual tests positive to COVID-19.

Based on internal Auburn-Washburn data, Board President, Michael White, has called a special Board of Education meeting on Sunday, August 22, 2:00 pm, in the Board Room of the Shuler Education Center. The single agenda item for this special meeting will be mitigation strategies. This special meeting is in addition to the regularly scheduled Board meeting on Monday, August 23, 6:30 pm, in the Board Room of the Shuler Education Center. All Board of Education meetings are open to the public and they are also livestreamed at usd437.net/live.

A detailed update will be sent to staff and parents following the Board meeting on Sunday.

Thanks,
Scott

Dr. Scott McWilliams
Superintendent of Schools

August 6, 2021

I remain committed to keeping you informed as we approach our first day of school with students next week. Our [Approach to the 2021-22 School Year document](#) posted on the district website is the best place to review current information. When new information is confirmed, that document will be updated so it remains accurate.

Here are confirmed updates from this week:

- It was confirmed by the Kansas State Department of Education on August 5 that masks are mandated on school buses due to a Federal Order. Order under Section 361 of the Public Health Service Act (42 U.S.C. 264) and 42 Code of Federal Regulations 70.2, 71.31(b), 71.32(b), Requirement for Persons to Wear Masks While on Conveyances at Transportation Hubs, includes school buses. This is not a recommendation; it is a Federal Order. We must comply with the Federal Order. This update was added to page 2 of our document.
- It was confirmed by the Shawnee County Health Department on August 4 that vaccinated individuals will not need to quarantine if they are a close contact to a positive case. I acknowledge there are varied opinions on vaccinations but the following language was added to page 2, “There are work-related and school-related benefits to vaccinations. Per the Shawnee County Health Department, vaccinated staff and

students will not need to quarantine if they are in close contact with a positive COVID-19 case. Therefore, the school year will not be disrupted for those individuals.”

- The Kansas Department of Health and Environment is providing funding for a Test to Learn / Test to Play option that is supported by the Shawnee County Health Department. Test to Learn / Test to Play is a modified in-school quarantine option which allows eligible students to continue to attend school and participate in activities while in quarantine. Detailed information was added to page 3 and 4. Auburn-Washburn is applying for Test to Learn / Test to Play so it can be an option for those choosing to use it (this is completely optional, a family choice). I will send an update when our application is approved.
- For the most part, Isolation and Quarantine guidelines have remained the same this school year compared to last year. The one point to highlight this year is Quarantine Exemptions which was added to page 5.

Thank you for remaining informed on this updated information. I hope you and your family have a wonderful weekend!

Thanks,
Scott

Dr. Scott McWilliams
Superintendent of Schools

July 28, 2021

Auburn-Washburn Staff and Parents,

I must admit three things up front about this message to all staff and parents. One, it is too long, and for that, I apologize. If you can please make it through to the end, and click on the link below that opens a document with more detailed information, you will have a clear picture on our approach to the 2021-22 school year. Two, I owe it to you to be very transparent, perhaps even a bit direct, to share the "why" behind our approach. And three, I actually planned to send a "back to school" message late last week, but because updated guidance regarding COVID-19 was set to be released this week, I paused before sending this message so those updates could be reviewed. So, with that as background, here is my message to staff and parents as we approach the 2021-22 school year.

Since joining the Auburn-Washburn team seven years ago, I have been committed to sharing factual information in a timely manner to keep you informed and engaged on our work with students and as a school district. Over the last seven years of sharing

with you, I have consistently been impressed by four things, that in my opinion, sets the Auburn-Washburn school community apart from others: 1) We have amazing students, 2) Our staff is second to none, 3) Our parents and families are engaged and extremely supportive, and 4) We are a proud and united school community. Thank you for all you have done and continue to do to make Auburn-Washburn such a special place!

As proud and united as we have traditionally been, it is my belief that the COVID-19 pandemic is pulling our school community apart. From March 2020 when our school environment was first impacted through today, differing thoughts have been shared about COVID-19, masks, distancing, quarantining, vaccinations, and how best to move forward as a school community. I get it, the environment we have been in for the last 17 months has been frustrating, confusing, and taxing. I encourage us this year, as a school community, to regain focus on the one thing that has always pulled us together: our students. What is in the best educational interest of our students as we begin the 2021-22 school year?

My response to that question is to keep students and staff safely in school every day this school year with the fewest number of required safety protocols in place as possible. Our school environment has been disrupted in multiple ways since March 2020 and our students deserve a steady and consistent school environment this entire school year. There are academic, social-emotional, and socialization student needs to meet and we can best meet those needs in learning environments that students feel are safe and comfortable. That was our approach this summer and our summer days have been extremely productive and successful. We provided more summer learning opportunities, camps, and activities this summer compared to previous summers. It has been wonderful having so many students in school this summer. Also, our stellar summer crews have thoroughly cleaned and disinfected all schools and buses so our facilities are ready for students and staff as we begin the school year.

As a reminder, the "Safely Forward in Auburn-Washburn: A Return to School Plan" that was in place last school year sunset on May 27, the final staff day of last school year. Since May 27, safety protocols have not been required in Auburn-Washburn, and thus far, COVID-19 concerns have not surfaced which includes our summer learning opportunities, camps, and activities. We will move into the 2021-22 school year without requiring safety protocols but will closely monitor internal Auburn-Washburn numbers when students return and school begins. Decisions on how to proceed will be based on internal Auburn-Washburn numbers. Families with unvaccinated students and unvaccinated staff are strongly encouraged to wear masks indoors during the school day. As a school community, we will be understanding and respectful to those wearing masks. In addition to closely monitoring internal Auburn-Washburn data, we will continue monitoring trend data in Shawnee County. At the county-level, COVID-19 numbers remained relatively flat through June but are trending upward in July.

Please [click here](#) for more detailed information on our approach to the 2021-22 school year.

After reading the information contained in the document linked above, I also wanted to state the following for clarity:

- Our first day of school with (most) students is August 12. We will track and review internal Auburn-Washburn student and staff COVID-19 and quarantine data closely each week of school. Factual updates will be shared with staff and parents on the following Fridays: August 13, August 20, August 27, and September 3. If internal Auburn-Washburn student or staff data becomes concerning or is not sustainable, then changes to our approach will be made.
- As stated above, the goal is to keep students and staff safely in school every day this school year with the fewest number of required safety protocols in place as possible. That goal was accomplished this summer when safety protocols were not required. Students and staff were welcome to wear masks, and some did, and it worked very well.
- In my role as superintendent, I will encourage staff and families with children ages 12 and older to get vaccinated. I know, there are varying opinions on vaccinations, but from a school leader's perspective, staff and students that are vaccinated will not need to quarantine if they are a close contact to a positive case. I want students and staff to remain in school and not at home in quarantine. We ended last year with approximately 85% of our staff vaccinated and we will stress the benefits of getting vaccinated with our newly hired staff this year.
- Routine communication will be established again this year with the Shawnee County Health Department, the Kansas State Department of Education, and possibly others.

Thank you for taking the time to read this message and the document contained in the link above. You know how much I respect the Auburn-Washburn school community; let's pull together as a united community this year to ensure our students have a steady and consistent school year.

Enjoy the remaining days of summer and looking forward to seeing students back in school on August 12!

Thanks,
Scott

Dr. Scott McWilliams
Superintendent of Schools