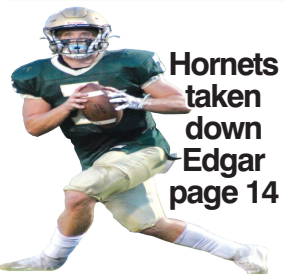


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INSIDE



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## Football players removed from quarantine

By Kevin O'Brien

Four Colby football players were taken off of a COVID quarantine list just hours before last Friday's Homecoming game against the Edgar Wildcats.

The decision came after a firestorm erupted among parents who were upset about their students possibly missing the pivotal game even though the students were not sick. Questions were also raised about whether the school district itself — and not the health department — was issuing quarantines, which would have gone against the district's own policy.

Superintendent Steve Kolden confirmed on Friday morning that the four players were among 20-plus students

identified as being in "close contact" with one of three students who tested positive for COVID-19 earlier in the week.

"The names were given to the health department, and then they'll be quarantined by the health department," he said just before noon on Friday.

However, once the parents found out about the quarantines, they showed up at Kolden's office on Friday morning and discussed different ways of preempting any action taken by the health department. One of them was to have the school district recheck to make absolutely sure the students were, indeed, close contacts.

At 3:13 p.m. on Friday, Kolden emailed the Clark County Health Department, asking her to remove the names of the four football players previously reported as close contacts.

"We were asked to 'revisit' the contact tracing for nine students this morning in a meeting with parents," Kolden wrote to Mews. He noted that he and high school principal Marcia Diedrich reviewed the cases and determined that five of the students should stay on the close contact list. The four that were removed from the list were all starting football players who went on to play in Friday's win over the Wildcats.

The decision was announced by one of the students at Friday afternoon's Homecoming pep assembly, generating wild cheers from the study body.

According to Mews, the health department had already officially placed the students under quarantine when she was essentially asked to rescind the order.

Mews said she complied with the district's request, but this will not happen again.

"Moving forward, once the information is given to the health department and once we formally quarantine, we will not be rescinding," she said. "We've never had this situation before, so it's always a learning process."

Mews said she honored the district's request to remove the names from quarantine without knowing that she had the

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### Whatever you do, don't let go!

Colby High School junior Alexia Martinez goes on a bumpy ride as her fellow juniors carry her along in a mattress race with the sophomore class. The Colby School District celebrated the return of Homecoming Week with games on Friday. The week culminated with a Colby Hornets victory over number one ranked Edgar on the football field, and a street dance outside Colby High on Saturday. See more photos on pages 10-11.

STAFF PHOTO/ROSS PATTERMANN

## CAPD asks for \$33,386 increase

By Kevin O'Brien

With a new police union contract successfully negotiated, the Colby-Abby Police Department is ready to ask the cities of Abbotsford and Colby for an increase in budget contributions next year.

Under a roughly \$1 million budget passed by the joint police commission on Monday, the two cities will pay \$33,386 more for police protection next year. Abbotsford will pay \$477,894 — or \$18,362 more — while Colby will pay \$391,004, an increase of \$15,024.

The school districts of Abbotsford and Colby will also be asked to pay more next year, with each district's share of the school resource officer increasing from \$26,307 to \$31,831, or \$5,524 more.

Overall, police chief Jason Bauer said he continues to try and run a "tight ship" when it comes to the budget.

"If you compare it to the previous year, it's not up drastically," he said. "We're up about \$11,000, less than one percent."

Most of the line items on the expense side of the budget stayed the same for next year, except for wages, which will increase by about \$19,000, from \$547,298 to \$566,345, next year.

Wage increases of 3.5 percent per year

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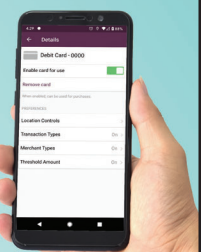
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# Quarantine

Continued from page 1

legal right to say no. To her knowledge, she said this is the first time parents have asked a district to revisit contact tracing.

In her biweekly meeting with the county's school superintendents, Mews said she stressed the importance of proper contact tracing.

"We're encouraging districts to do their due diligence to make sure these students actually meet the criteria for a close contact," she said.

A "close contact" is defined as anyone who has been within six feet of a COVID-positive person for a total of 15 minutes or more over a 24-hour period.

The district normally uses seating charts and interviews with teachers to determine who meets the close contact criteria.

When rechecking the close contact status, Kolden said two of the students who were eventually removed from the list happened to be sitting next to each other and had "identical circumstances" when it came to their contact with COVID-positive student.

"In two instances, a student ended up moving around a lot in the room so they were actually not in close contact for 15 or more minutes," he said.

Kolden said administrators learned this from talking to the student who had tested positive.

Two other students had been in physical education class when they were initially identified as close contacts, but a second check revealed that they did not fit the definition, Kolden said.

"Staff determined that they were less than 15 minutes," he said.

Kolden pointed out that two cross-country runners, who had a meet on Saturday, were kept on the close contact list.

"We have other student-athletes who are remaining quarantined," he said.

When a student is told they have been identified as a close contact, the school recommends that they begin self-quarantining at home, but that is not requirement, Kolden said. Only the health department can order a quarantine, he emphasized.

Kolden said the student-athletes or their parents were first informed of the "close contact" determination Thursday afternoon before practices that night.

"When we identify a close contact that's an athlete, we'll have a verbal conversation with those kids and ask them to go home and not practice that night," he said.

In an email exchange with a parent, Kolden defended the district's practice of reporting COVID cases and close con-



**REASON TO CELEBRATE** - The Colby Hornets football team celebrates the news that four of its players will not be quarantined prior to Friday night's Homecoming game against the Edgar Wildcats. *STAFF PHOTO/ROSS PATTERMANN*

tacts to the health department.

"In order to keep ALL students safe and IN SCHOOL as much as possible, it's in the best interest of the district to identify students who are positive and those who are close contacts to a positive case," Kolden wrote. "We will continue to utilize this procedure regardless of their athletic standing."

## Quarantine confusion

The controversy over the football players' quarantine status was not the only one involving COVID protocols last week.

Parents of kids in an entire fifth-grade class were told to keep their kids home from school, from Wednesday through Friday, before any quarantine orders were issued by the health department.

Parent Kurt Meyer said he received a notice via text message that appeared to be from health department on Wednesday morning, but was actually from the school district.

"His entire classroom was told to stay home," he said. "Then, I found out his teacher was still in school on Friday. They had to do their online class with her, and my son could see in the background that she was in his classroom."

When asked about the teacher still being in school, Kolden said "vaccinated individuals don't need to be quarantined."

Meyer said he was never contacted by the county health department, even though last school year, he was contacted twice when his children were determined to be close contacts.

Without being contacted by the health department, Meyer was left wondering if his child was truly under quarantine or not. Meyer said his son's teacher contact-

ed them on Sunday to let them know that he was free to return to class on Monday.

Another parent, Denny Meyer, didn't know his daughter had supposedly been quarantined until the school secretary called him on Wednesday morning and asked him why he had not picked his daughter up from school.

"I was supposed to already know," he said. "They were like 'Why didn't you pick your kid up?'"

Meyer said was he never notified by the health department, so he started calling and leaving messages with the middle school principal and superintendent.

"She missed three days of school that she should never have missed," he said.

Kolden said some confusion was caused by an outdated message being sent out that read "Notice to Quarantine. Immediate Notice to Pick Up Your Child." He said the district's current policy allows parents to keep their students in school until they have been formally notified by the health department.

One issue is a backlog in notifications from the health departments. This problem has been particularly bad on the Marathon County side, but Kolden noted that Clark County is currently 245 notices behind when it comes to close contacts in schools.

Moving forward, Mews said her department is trying to close the gap between when students are first notified of their close contact status and when they start quarantining.

"They're allowing quarantined kids to be in school until the health department contacts them, which is just not a great practice," she said. "It goes against any type of expert, medical and professional

health guidance."

To reach that goal, the Clark County Health Department has developed a four-page letter explaining the quarantine procedures for unvaccinated individuals who have been identified as close contacts. The letter goes out to individuals through the district's alert system before a quarantine is officially issued, making it clear that a 14-day quarantine is required.

Some parents have tried to get rapid COVID tests done to prove that their kids did not have the virus. Kolden said a negative test will not reverse a quarantine decision.

"The only way to get out of quarantine is if you are fully vaccinated or if you've had a positive PCR test within 90 days, which means you've had COVID," he said. "If you get COVID, you kind of have a free ticket for 90 days."

(PCR tests determine if a person has the COVID antibodies in their system.)

Questions have also been raised about whether or not the district is required to participate in contact tracing.

"Technically, it's not a requirement, but it would definitely be a very large liability concern if they do not contact trace," Mews said.

Kolden checked with the district's legal counsel to see if the district is legally obligated to tell the health department about close contacts. He got a response that directly quotes a state statute on communicable diseases:

"If a teacher, school nurse or principal of any school or child care center knows or suspects that a communicable disease is present in a school district or center, he or she shall at once notify the local health officer," the law states.

With the number of students on quarantine increasing, questions are also being raised about how kids are keeping up with their school work.

Currently, Kolden said students on quarantine are just being treated as if they are out for an excused sick day.

"We didn't really plan on a virtual option, and now we're starting to explore that," Kolden said. "We're getting more questions about going virtual."

## School nurse resigns

The turmoil created by quarantines is not just affecting students.

The school district's nurse, Trina Kaiser, submitted her resignation last Friday, based on concerns with a district policy that allows students with COVID symptoms to stay in school as long as their parents are notified.

"My nursing license is being directly compromised by the actions of the board," she wrote in a letter to school board members. "I can no longer work under these conditions."

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