

January 1, 2022

Dear Staff and Parents,

Happy New Year! I hope everyone found peace and enjoyment during the holiday season. As promised, the following is an update based on the current information we have. The State of CT sent multiple emails over the weekend, and our administrative team met to review, discuss, and make plans for our return to school tomorrow, January 3, 2022. At this time, we have appropriate staffing and will be strengthening many of our mitigation strategies.

The Commissioner of Education sent a [comprehensive email](#) on the new strategies being implemented statewide to ensure that schools can remain open for in-person learning. The statewide strategies for keeping schools safely open are focused on (1) vaccination, (2) testing, and (3) implementation of mitigation strategies. **You will be receiving information about vaccine clinics in January and February from our District Nurse Supervisor, Anne Dalton, as well as detailed information about the changes to quarantining/isolation in a separate communication.**

Changes to Isolation/Quarantining

The new State of CT guidance aligns with recent CDC recommendations, which shortens the length of quarantine from 10 to 5 days. Please refer to the following link for the information related to these changes: [new guidance](#). The memo outlines the changes to current guidance and the reasons why the public health experts feel a shift is appropriate at this time. The changes essentially lessen the time needed for quarantining and allow for a shift away from the hours spent on contact tracing. However, even with these changes, a daily general communication will be sent to families from each building principal notifying families of new cases. These will be updated on the dashboard as well.

Mitigation Strategies and Precautionary Measures

We will continue to employ mitigation strategies and precautionary measures in light of an increase in positivity rates:

Custodians will increase their cleaning and sanitizing bathrooms throughout the day, and all drinking fountains will be closed so that students can use the water bottle filling stations safely. **Please send in a water bottle with your student.**

- Hand sanitizers will continue to be accessible in all buildings.
- Universal masking of all students and staff will continue to remain in place. While not required, N95 masks are coming and will be distributed for use for those who would like them. We will have some test kits available and will update you when these are received.

- COVID-19 test kits are forthcoming, and we will let you know when these are available.
- Students will remain masked on buses and reminded about respectful behavior, including sitting in one seat for the duration of the trip to and from school.
- Group work, or extended activities in groups, will be paused so that students will remain properly spaced in classrooms and in other areas. Keeping classroom cohorts together with adequate spacing is an important tool in mitigating exposure.
- Ongoing reminders about the importance of frequent hand washing will be discussed at school.
- We will continue to request that families keep students home when they are ill or have any symptoms of illness.
- When it is feasible and weather permits, students will have “outside” time for recess, and teachers will rotate masks breaks safely when inside (e.g., every other row or different times).
- Schools will continue to space students in cafeterias (lunch waves were added to ensure appropriate spacing).
- We will temporarily limit volunteers to schools and classrooms at this time.

Remote Learning

The State also issued an update in the use of [remote learning guidance](#). Districts can not individually make decisions to use remote learning due to an outbreak or staffing issues. Remote learning decisions can only be made by gubernatorial or legislative authority. Districts can, however, continue to offer remote learning opportunities for students in isolation or quarantine. Therefore, we will *continue to ensure all materials are uploaded on Google Classroom and students will be able to access information and receive guidance during daily check-ins with qualified staff who will guide them when they are absent from in-person learning.*

While we continue to remain diligent about our use of precautionary measures and mitigation strategies when cases increase, we also know from multiple years of data that our schools remain safe spaces for students and staff. However, that is only when we stay focused on working collaboratively and maintaining individual and collective responsibility for the health and safety of everyone in our school community.

We can only accomplish keeping our schools open with your help. I know everyone is more than exhausted and frustrated. We understand. Please know that our school staff and administration is doing its best to ensure our school community remains safe, continues to be able to provide in-person learning, and is working closely with our local and State health departments to monitor positivity rates and trends that impact our community.

Respectfully,

Dr. Lorrie Rodrigue, Superintendent