

January 6, 2022

Dear students, parents and caregivers,

As we prepare for the full return to in-person learning on Monday, January 10, I wanted to share some important information and updates with you.

Throughout this week, in addition to supporting the limited students who needed to attend school (those with diverse needs, children of frontline workers, etc.), our district and school staff have been carefully reviewing all our protocols and updating health and safety plans and practices as needed. Starting on Monday:

- School gatherings and events for staff and students will be held virtually whenever possible.
- Events that must be in person (e.g. inter-school games, theatre productions), will be held in spaces where capacity will not exceed 50% of the maximum, and no outside spectators will be allowed.
- For the time being, all extracurricular sports tournaments (any meeting of 3 or more teams) have been put on hold.
- Visitors will be limited to only those who are supporting activities directly related to student learning and well-being.
- Health and safety teams at each school have been hard at work this week as they enhance measures that take the specific needs of each site and classroom into consideration. Changes at our individual schools may include things like:
 - New arrangements in classrooms and shared spaces to reduce face-to-face seating, wherever possible.
 - Possible changes to daily schedules (e.g. recess or class transition times) to prevent crowding in hallways at key times.

Tomorrow you will receive more information from your individual school about the adaptations that have been made at each site.

We remain committed to continuing to support the educational needs of our students. If children are absent from school due to a positive case or the need to self-isolate, our staff will coordinate some combination of online or home learning options to help keep all students moving forward in their classes.

As we know, what's happening in our schools is reflective of what's happening in our community, and our leadership teams have had to consider and plan for the continued or increased impact of case counts on our staffing levels. While we will still use our on-call and casual staff to supplement school-based staff absences, in addition to District staff in required situations, we are also contingency planning for the possibility that extreme staff shortages may require we temporarily call a Functional Closure to a school: a temporary shift to online or home learning options, allowing us to provide continuity of learning until we can safely staff and support all students back at a particular school. This is an emergency step that will only be taken if there is no other way to safely support students in-person ... a decision that will be made sparingly and on a case-by-case basis, in consultation with school and District leadership (and in some cases, potentially also with consultation of our partners at Fraser Health).

As we continue to adapt to the Omicron variant – working with the Ministry of Education and the health and safety authorities who take the lead in this health crisis – this is a good time to also

remind everyone of some key health and safety measures that remain in place:

- All K-12 students, staff and visitors are required to wear a mask in all indoor areas, including at desks and on school busses.
 - Exemptions remain in place for temporary times where they may be removed (e.g. when eating or drinking, when playing a wind instrument).
 - Exemptions remain in place for those with psychological, behavioural or physical reasons why they cannot tolerate a mask – though a new Mask Exemption Request Form will be sent by schools for those requesting or needing the exemption.
 - We have ensured that we have a sufficient supply of disposable 3-layer non-medical masks at every site, should students or staff require them.
- It is the responsibility of parents and caregivers to ensure that a Daily Health Check is completed for each student, before they attend school each day.
 - You can find the student Daily Health Check form here: https://newwestschools.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/NWS_HealthCheck_StudentLetter2021_FINAL_WEB.pdf
 - Or you can use the Province's online assessment tool: <https://www.k12dailycheck.gov.bc.ca/healthcheck?execution=e1s1>
- Enhanced cleaning protocols will remain in place.
- We continuing to maximize our ventilation systems at each site, meeting or exceeding the recommended standards wherever possible. You can find ventilation system overviews for each school and site here: <https://newwestschools.ca/ventilation-systems-documentation-for-each-school>
- Our District's updated Health and Safety Plan can be found here: <https://newwestschools.ca/daily-health-checks-and-safety-plans-for-2021-22/>
- For anyone who has tested positive for COVID-19, or is a close contact of someone with COVID-19, it is vital that you and your family follow the Fraser Health requirements around self-monitoring and/or self-isolation: <https://www.fraserhealth.ca/health-topics-a-to-z/coronavirus/preventing-covid-19/self-isolation-information#.YdYfUmjMKUk>
- As the provincial health authorities continue to reiterate, getting vaccinated is one of the most important steps that individuals can take to help protect their own health and that of those who work and live around them. If you would like to find out more about COVID-19 vaccinations, you can find that out here: <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/covid-19/vaccine/register>
- And a reminder to parents and caregivers at our elementary and middle schools in particular: please support the work that's happening inside our schools by supporting safety outside of it as well.
 - If you're in close proximity to others at busy pick-up and drop-off times, please consider whether you or your child should wear a mask.
 - If you are taking advantage of playgrounds outside of school hours, consider coming back at a different time if the playground is busy.

As we look forward, we also anticipate there will be changes coming around access to rapid testing kits in the community, and the notification processes used by Fraser Health. We will continue to work with our partners, following their direction and lead as we adapt to the evolving needs of this pandemic. And we will communicate with you as new information is provided.

Thank you all for continuing to be our partners in keeping students, staff and our school communities as safe as possible.

Sincerely,



Karim Hachlaf
Superintendent of Schools / CEO

