



# SUFFIELD PUBLIC SCHOOLS

## *Office of the Superintendent*

*Timothy M. Van Tassel*  
Superintendent

*Laura Guerrette*  
Executive Secretary

October 14, 2021

Dear Suffield Public Schools Parents, Guardians, Faculty and Staff:

The purpose of this communication is to provide district notification of an identified COVID-19 cluster at McAlister Intermediate School. While we cannot be certain that the cluster of positive cases within a single classroom is the result of school-based transmission, it is important that we act swiftly to minimize the impact of this small rash of classroom-based cases. The following information is intended to highlight our district's response to our first outbreak of the 2021-2022 school year and request your support to minimize its potential impact.

At this moment, I want to reassure you that the district continues to follow the guidance as recommended by the Department of Public Health and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Our school district continues to take the pandemic very seriously for the betterment of all of you, and our weekly communications with our Medical Advisor, North Central District Health Department, Emergency Management Director, and First Selectmen have been an ongoing and important safety net since the beginning of this pandemic. Everyone is very aware of our current situation at McAlister Intermediate School, and they are poised to take further action if necessary to safeguard students, staff, and the community if the situation worsens.

In terms of our response to this outbreak, McAlister Intermediate School and A. Ward Spaulding School will be taking several important steps to minimize the potential for further transmission. The following will remain in effect **at our elementary schools** through October 29, 2021:

- Extending the definition of Close Contacts to 6 feet;
- Discontinuation of in-classroom meeting spaces (ie. carpets for Morning Meeting);
- Discontinuation of small group instruction;
- Discontinuation of group seating arrangements in classrooms;
- Increasing student distancing in cafeterias by using classrooms as lunch spaces;
- Reduction of inter-classroom activities on the playground and indoors;
- Minimizing movement in classroom throughout the day (ie. snack time);
- Regular reinforcement of proper hygiene, mask-wearing, and social distancing practices.

It is important to note that the district had already placed the classroom where the cluster exists into quarantine prior to returning to school on Tuesday. This was done immediately upon our identification of multiple class-specific cases that had possible connections. While we hope to lessen our heightened restrictions following October 29, 2021, this is highly dependent on the positive case trends we are experiencing in our elementary schools. It is also important to state that increased cases in either of our secondary schools could broaden the scope of our intervention strategies. We recognize that non-school related exposures can happen among

siblings and friends, and we are prepared to implement a measured and districtwide response if the outbreak extends beyond McAlister Intermediate School. Lastly, it is important to share that the district, in conjunction with our health officials, could modify an individual school's or the district's operational status if we are faced with a significant surge in positive cases across our schools. We remain very hopeful that this will not occur during the upcoming year; however, it is important that everyone is aware of this possibility.

In conclusion, I am requesting that our entire Suffield Public Schools community work together to contain the spread of this virus when outbreaks occur this year. They are likely to happen, and I am confident we can handle them. The knowledge we have gained from our own lived experiences over the past two years, and the contributions that science and health officials have provided us, are there for us to rely on in putting forth a strong defense system against COVID-19. I am confident and hopeful that a unified response by everyone will keep our students, staff, families, and community safe as this pandemic shifts to endemic in the years ahead.

We thank you for your support, and please do not hesitate to contact me with any questions.

Sincerely,  
Timothy M. Van Tasel, Ed.D.  
Superintendent of School