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## Superintendent's Update 11-5-21

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Fri, Nov 5, 2021 at 4:15 PM

Greetings,

I hope that you and your family had enjoyable Halloween weekends with opportunities for our students to just be kids. Halloween is one of my favorite seasonal events with my kids. We have such fun trying to outdo each other with our costumes and decorations. Although I hold the all-time family award for best costume ever (I was the Stay Puft Marshmallow Man from Ghostbusters!!), my daughter Ella took the prize at home and at a neighborhood party this year with her pirate costume.

This year has been harder than we all anticipated for a variety of reasons. Our collective endurance has been tested. A festive Halloween, followed by a respite on Election Day, certainly provided some relief. The Thanksgiving break is around the corner and we are gaining momentum with Covid rates plummeting, and vaccination rates soaring. Below are some updates for our school community.

**COVID Update:** Fortunately, Covid infection rates have hovered at levels we have not seen since May. We have not experienced a case in our schools for nearly two weeks. Additionally, as we opened up registration for the vaccination clinic for 5-11 year olds, we quickly registered just under 1,000 K-6 students.

With these developments, we have begun to consider relaxing many of our Covid mitigating measures over the next few weeks. Staying consistent with our 4-6 week increment analysis, it is anticipated that we will relax and modify our measures in a number of areas.

All of the measures under consideration will be communicated to parents and the WPS team in advance of implementation. All of these proposed modifications are subject to change pending infection rates.

The following are the areas under consideration:

- **Lunch:** As the weather cools and rates continue to stay low, we will return all students to the cafeteria while continuing to distance to the maximum extent possible.
- **Dismissal:** Each school, particularly at the elementary level, will revisit dismissal procedures to determine the most efficient way to release students to parents who are not taking the bus. For some schools, this might result in students being released from a common area to parents. Each school may differ based on a variety of factors (i.e. driveway capacity, traffic flow, etc.).
- **K-6 Weekly Serial Covid Testing:** The voluntary weekly serial Covid testing program will continue through the end of November and, pending continued low infection rates and high vaccination rates, will subsequently sunset. Advanced notice will be provided to parents who desire to continue testing on their own with local providers.
- **Vaccination Requirement for School Visitors:** Since the beginning of the school year we have required proof of vaccination for school visitors. Additionally, the Governor used his Executive Powers to mandate vaccination for all employees with the provision of legal exemptions. As infection rates continue to hover at low levels and vaccination rates in the community are high, and now increasing, we will relax the vaccination requirement for visitors in the near future. We cannot modify the requirement for employees as that is an Executive Order from the Governor's office.
- **Vaccination Requirement for Parent/Teacher Conferences:** Until this provision is relaxed, we ask that any parents attending parent/teacher conferences enter the building only if vaccinated. Provisions will be made for virtual conferences in the event a parent is not vaccinated.
- **Welcoming Larger Groups of Parent Visitors to Our Buildings:** Small groups of vaccinated visitors have been welcomed into our schools since the start of the school year. As we relax our measures, we will begin to welcome in larger groups of visitors, such as general PTA meetings.
- **Universal Masking:** Although universal masking requirements at the municipal level have been relaxed, all schools remain under the Governor's Executive Order to maintain universal masking until February. The Governor indicated that he may revisit this provision after the New Year. In the interim, we will maintain universal masking.
- **Modified Quarantine Procedures "Screen and Stay":** Quarantines have been a necessary, yet highly disruptive mitigating measure throughout the entire pandemic. As infection rates hover at low levels, the CT Department of Public Health issued new guidance ("Screen and Stay") which enables "close contacts" to stay in school with certain caveats. Vaccinated students and staff are still not required to quarantine.(see below)

**“Screen and Stay”:** Yesterday, Governor Lamont announced the "Screen and Stay" initiative in an effort to limit the amount of quarantine cases related to COVID-19 and keep kids in school. This will allow students and staff who are not fully vaccinated but have been identified as a close contact to remain in school. Staff or students who are identified as eligible will be required to complete and submit a daily screening questionnaire to report any signs of illness. This form will be provided by your school nurse after the contact tracing process is complete.

“Screen and Stay” will be offered under the following circumstances:

- The contact occurred during the school day (does not include extracurricular or outside of school, social or household exposure)
- If indoors or on a school bus and both the contact and the case were masked during the exposure
- During brief unmasked periods (e.g., snack time, cafeteria) where 6 feet or more of space was maintained
- If outdoors, masked or unmasked, but staff supervised (e.g., mask breaks, PE, recess)
- The student or staff remain asymptomatic

Again, all of the measures under consideration will be communicated to parents and the WPS team in advance of implementation. All of these proposed modifications are subject to change pending infection rates.

**Elementary School “Guest Riders” on Buses:** Given the recent condensing of bus routes, we cannot guarantee that “guest riders” (i.e. students travelling on another bus not assigned to them) will have a seat on another bus when riding to a friend’s house or other location. For this reason, and for the interim, we will not be able to accommodate these requests until a full stable of buses and bus drivers have been reestablished.

I hope that each of you have a great weekend and enjoy the crisp autumn weather.

Respectfully,  
Thomas Scarice  
Superintendent of Schools

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