



Fredericksburg City Public Schools
210 Ferdinand Street
Fredericksburg, Virginia 22401

January 1, 2022

Dear FCPS Families, Employees, and Community,

We hope that your holiday break has been restful, rewarding, and enjoyable with family and friends.

Staff will return on Monday, January 3, 2022 for a workday/building in-service day in preparation for the return to in-person learning on Tuesday, January 4. Students who previously chose to participate in a virtual learning program will continue as planned.

Understanding all the negative impacts the pandemic has had since early 2020, we are committed to providing in-person learning to our students. We know that this approach is best for children academically, socially, and emotionally. And, we believe this is what is best for the families we serve.

Since the holiday break began, please know that we have been closely monitoring developments with COVID-19 and in particular the Omicron variant with the increases of positive cases across Virginia and the United States. We have been in contact with the local health department and have met with the Rappahannock Area Health District to remain informed and seek guidance. Additionally, the FCPS COVID-19 Team also met to prepare for a safe return. The Health District is not recommending any pause or delay in re-opening schools on January 4 and encourages our continued excellent mitigation of COVID-19 spread.

Please know that situations can change quickly, necessitating the Health District guidance to also change.

We realize that there will be concern when we re-open with students on January 4. It is imperative that we all continue to emphasize mitigation strategies and encourage vaccinations to stop the spread of COVID-19. We are taking the following approaches to promote mitigation:

GUIDANCE & COORDINATION

We will continue to follow the [Virginia Department of Health \(VDH\)/Virginia Department of Education \(VDOE\) Interim Guidance for COVID-19 Prevention](#).

We will also follow the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\) Guidance for COVID-19 Prevention in Schools](#).

We will continue to meet weekly with the Rappahannock Area Health District and local school divisions.

The FCPS COVID-19 Team will continue to meet weekly and remain on call seven days a week.

FCPS participates in the VDH and VDOE Virginia School Screening Testing for Assurance (ViSSTA) program, which offers COVID-19 testing to K-12 schools. The ViSSTA program will support screening testing for interested students and staff once it is up-and-running; this is not required. Also, through this program, we maintain and distribute home test kits for students and staff who are close contacts or symptomatic. Currently, we have nearly 300 tests available.

VACCINATION

We encourage everyone to get vaccinated because we know it is a critical step to get us back to normal. We want people to be vaccinated because it improves the chances of staying healthy and helps prevent the spread of the virus to others. We want to be part of a community that is protected from the virus and keeps it from spreading and replicating which would allow it to mutate and possibly become more resistant. We have held several vaccination clinics at school last fall and will work with the health department to schedule more.

Currently, 86% of FCPS staff are vaccinated. According to the Virginia Department of Health website, 41.1% of children ages 5-17 are vaccinated in Fredericksburg.

STAY HOME WHEN SICK

It is critical everyone monitors themselves and their children for symptoms of COVID-19. Individuals who are sick or have symptoms should stay home.

To mitigate the risk of spread, individuals who are symptomatic with the following should stay home:

- Fever or chills
- Cough
- Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing
- Fatigue
- Muscle or body aches
- Headache
- New loss of taste or smell
- Sore throat
- Congestion or runny nose
- Nausea or vomiting
- Diarrhea

Individuals who are unsure should stay home and consult with a medical care professional.

DISTANCING AND MASKS

Adults will continue to maintain at least 6 feet from students at all times in school buildings to the maximum extent possible. Unvaccinated staff must maintain 6 feet from all other staff at all times.

All students should be at least 3 feet apart, regardless of vaccination status.

We will continue to require masks as we return to school following the winter break. Through masking, our schools will be:

- Maintaining a layer of mitigation for staff and students when physical distancing is not possible.
- Significantly reducing potential disruption to the educational environment caused by student quarantines.
- Providing time for more students to receive vaccinations and for more age groups to become eligible for boosters.
- Reducing potential impacts to staffing due to employee illness or quarantine.

ATHLETICS

We follow the VDH/VDOE *Interim Guidance* which puts education first by prioritizing educational opportunities over athletics, extracurricular activities, and other events in school. Athletic practices and events will continue according to the existing mitigation protocols. Please be aware that individual teams or events may need to be paused for the safety of all participants.

NEW CDC GUIDANCE

The CDC recently released new guidance regarding quarantine periods. On December 30, 2021, we learned that the VDH adopted the CDC guidance, effective immediately, and is updating its guidance for isolation and quarantine. The VDH is reviewing current webpages and guidance documents and expects they will all be updated over the next couple of weeks as the guidance is applied to various settings.

We are now following CDC/VDH guidance and are making plans to continue our coordination and service to staff and families.

Please remember that Virginia law requires Virginia schools to be open for in-person learning this 2021-2022 school year. Of course, there will be times when a temporary pause to in-person learning might be needed for these reasons: problematic community transmission, several school outbreaks in a short period of time or large outbreaks, low staff capacity, and/or high student absenteeism. It is important to know that we can close schools temporarily but only when “deemed appropriate in collaboration with the local health department.” We always work with the local health department in these matters and are partners with them in making these important shared decisions.

There is much unknown out there regarding what COVID numbers mean and the impact of this Omicron variant in January. We know that communication is important as all of us are working together to keep everyone safe.

As always, we appreciate your support and patience as we navigate together many unknowns in challenging times. And too, know that high-quality teaching and learning in a safe environment are what we all plan for, want, and demand.

To each and all, happiness and well-being in 2022.