

Dear Simsbury Staff and Families:

Happy New Year! I sincerely hope you've had some time to relax and celebrate the holidays with loved ones – we certainly needed it! With that said, the news about the recent COVID surge does not cease in terms of both the changing metrics brought on by the omicron variant and the response at the various levels of government. While much of the information is still incomplete, I wanted to address some topics ahead of our scheduled return to in-person instruction on Monday, January 3rd.

- **Test Kits and N-95 Masks** – As you surely saw in the news, the State of Connecticut has promised to distribute three million rapid antigen test kits as soon as possible. One million of these are targeted to municipalities to distribute to residents. Two million kits are earmarked for K-12 schools. Additionally, the Governor's office indicated that it was also prepared to distribute N-95 masks to school systems. We have not yet been informed what Simsbury's allotment or distribution of test kits and masks will be, but we are being told we should receive them by next week and will communicate accordingly.
- **Quarantine Guidelines** – One of the major pieces of news from the last few days was the CDC's announcement that it was revising recommendations for quarantine of asymptomatic cases. **Please know that these new guidelines have not yet been approved for Connecticut schools.** We have received word from both the State Department of Education (SDE) and our own Farmington Valley Health Department that we must continue to enforce quarantines under the guidance we had been using until such time that the Department of Public Health approves a change.
- **Remote Learning** – As recently as today we received a communication from the SDE affirming their commitment to in-person learning with a renewed focus on mitigation strategies as we return from break. Please know at this time, individual districts do not have the authority to pivot to remote learning. As of now, that possibility has not been discussed with Superintendents.
- **Collection of Vaccination Information** – Vaccination remains the most important strategy for keeping staff and students in school by mitigating the spread of COVID and limiting the severity of symptoms. Later next week, we will be asking families to participate in a voluntary survey asking them to share their child's vaccination card, utilizing the same methodology we used earlier in the year with both staff and middle and high school students. We know that many of our elementary-aged students achieved fully-vaccinated status during December, and we believe that this information will inform our district's overall decision-making as well as assist our nurses with contact tracing and follow through.
- **Mitigation Strategies** – A post-vacation re-commitment to mitigation strategies is important to help reduce the spread of COVID in the school setting.
  - Stay home if you are sick, including cold-like symptoms
  - Use proper masking in indoor spaces
  - Employ social distancing to the greatest extent possible
  - Continue with good hand hygiene, including utilizing hand sanitizer

Some experts are predicting that the current surge is peaking between now and early January. Therefore, the next month is a critical time to focus our efforts on doing all we can to keep schools safe and open.

Please feel free to reach out to your building principal or our COVID Liaison, Assistant Superintendent Neil Sullivan with any questions. Otherwise, please enjoy your last few days of break, and stay healthy!

Sincerely,

Matt Curtis  
Superintendent