

Friday, January 7, 2022

RE: Welcoming all K-12 students for full return to school on January 10th

Dear Families,

I would like to begin by expressing my appreciation to you for your support and to staff for their incredible planning that has occurred this week. This week, our District and schools have been planning for the continuity of learning and reinforcing health and safety measures to provide a safe return for all K-12 students on Monday, January 10th. Together, we are implementing new protocols and preparing for challenges that the Omicron variant may present, including the possibility of a school closure.

We know schools are supportive places for our students' social and cognitive development, therefore, we continue to work on our continuity of learning plans for students. This plan includes reinforcing and reminding everyone of the multiple layers of protection in place to provide safe learning environments for students and staff, including:

- Mandatory Mask wearing (required for K-12 indoors)
- Maximizing space between people; and avoiding face to face seating where possible
- Implementing strategies to avoid crowding during drop off, pick up and class transitions
- Holding all school gatherings and events virtually
- Holding all staff meetings virtually
- Limiting school visitors to those who are supporting activities that directly benefit student learning and well-being (e.g., teacher candidates, meal program volunteers, etc.)
- Pausing extracurricular sports tournaments and no spectators for indoor games

For all of the health and safety measures in our schools, please review our updated [Communicable Disease Prevention Plan](#). All schools are directly connecting with their school community to share site specific operational changes to prepare for a smooth transition on Monday.

In order to keep our schools and communities safe, we require the on-going support and diligence of families when it comes to monitoring [key symptoms of illness](#). It is very important that all students and staff complete their [daily health check](#) before attending school and stay home if they are feeling sick. If you are feeling unwell and unsure about your symptoms call 8-1-1.

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The Greater Victoria School District wishes to recognize and acknowledge the Esquimalt and Songhees Nations, on whose traditional territories, we live, we learn, and we do our work.

We know that vaccines are the best form of protection in the on-going battle against COVID-19. If you haven't already, please consider getting your vaccine or booster shot as soon as possible, if eligible.

Potential School Closures

We understand that a school closure can be unsettling and disrupting for families. We are sharing this information in advance so families can determine a plan should a school closure be required. In addition, the District is working on supports for children with disabilities and exceptional needs. A reminder to families, to ensure their contact information is current at the school level.

In the event of a school closure, the school will pivot to remote/online at home learning. It is important to highlight the different types of school closures and share an overview of what will occur.

Health Closure

A Health Closure of a school is determined by the Island Health Authority due to the possibility of a high COVID-19 case count in a school. In this situation the District would receive direction from Island Health to temporarily close a school. The District would then move to a temporary Remote/Online Learning program for all students.

Functional School Closure

A Functional School Closure is determined by the District due to a lack of staff to provide the required level of teaching, supervision, support and/or custodial care to ensure the health and safety of students. When this happens, the District will be closing the school for a minimum of one week (seven calendar days). During a functional closure, the school will transition to remote/online learning.

In the event of a functional closure, all families will be notified by the District. The District will strive to contact families the afternoon prior to a closure, however, it is important to note that staffing challenges may arise after the instructional day has begun. If changes occur during the school day, families will be notified to pick up their children or provide permission for them to leave school. Students who are unable to be picked up or transported home will be supervised by available staff until the end of the instructional day.

On the first day of a functional closure, families can expect to be contacted by their teacher(s) about the remote/online learning programming. If a student requires a device for remote/online learning, arrangements will be made through the school. On day two through seven, instruction will be provided daily by the teacher remotely. It is expected that after a week, the students will return back to face to face instruction.

Contact Tracing/Notification Process

We have been informed by Island Health that Contact Tracing as we have known it is no longer effective with the Omicron variant due to a short incubation stage, changes to transmission rates and self testing. As such we are aware that changes are coming to the contact tracing and notification process. We are still awaiting final details but will inform you of the changes as soon as we are notified.

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Again, I would like to thank all of you for your continued patience and efforts as we experience the largest wave of COVID-19. As this situation continues to evolve, we will work to keep you apprised of new developments or changes.

I recognize and acknowledge how challenging it has been for families and staff. I appreciate how committed our families and our staff have been in ensuring we continue to support all students in their learning. If your child requires additional support such as mental health resources or counselling, please connect with your School Principal.

We are looking forward to having all students return to the classroom on Monday.

Thank you,



Deb Whitten
Interim Superintendent

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One *Learning* Community

