

Parent Update 12/4/2020

Good Afternoon Parents,

I hope this finds you well. I shared with our educators the act of sitting to compose the weekly updates often evokes in me a tremendous sense of gratitude and humility. I am awed by the incredible work of our staff and students and recognize the amazing privilege that I have to lead our district.

There are a few updates for you this week from Windham Southeast Supervisory Union.

- **Remote Learning After Vacation-** For your advanced planning, ***we will be fully remote the week of January 4th through January 8th.*** In the coming weeks, we will provide further information regarding the distribution of meals. To be fully transparent, this decision was rather difficult and I understand the impact this may have on our families. While we are encountering a surge of the COVID-19 virus, the present case count was only a small factor in this decision. One of my foundational beliefs in education is that we must purposefully cultivate trusting relationships with our families and staff. Connected to this is the notion that we must also avoid creating scenarios that may cause any sense of mistrust. A secondary and equally important belief is that we must have sound operational systems in place in our schools so that we are able to meet the needs of our students and families. The new screening question regarding multi family gatherings taxed and strained this system. While many of our schools were able to barely make it through this week, I am concerned in the impact this stress has placed upon our educators. The sacrifices of our families and staff in curtailing holiday gatherings is greatly appreciated and indicative of the community commitment that has allowed the COVID-19 case count in Vermont to remain so low. The religious holidays at the end of the month present a new set of factors for our families and staff to determine, especially as it regards to quarantining. Announcing a transition to one week of remote learning at this time will allow our teachers and administrators to engage in the thorough planning necessary for a successful learning experience for our students.
- **Multi-family gatherings** - We will continue to use our daily screening question about multi-family gatherings for the foreseeable future. While I mentioned above that this question has caused some challenges, it is one additional tool we have at our disposal to enhance the safety of our buildings' occupants. A FAQ from the Agency of Education can be found [here](#).
- **Updates on the Second Semester** - We are in the process of finalizing a document for families in grades K - 6 and middle grades regarding the second semester. As has been discussed, we will be transitioning to a greater number of days of in person learning. This information will be sent early next week and a corresponding commitment survey will be sent by schools mid-week. We anticipate a response due date of 12/15 so our teams can start the planning process.

The process of transitioning to the second semester will include the need for bus registration/sign up as well. As with the first semester, all students within the transportation zone will be able to ride the bus but an assigned route will not be automatically assigned. We have discovered that the sign up process in the first semester allowed our transportation to efficiently and effectively schedule the bus routes as well as to manage a safe number of students on each bus. A separate 'survey' link will be sent for that process as well.

The question has been raised as to why we are heading in the direction of planning for returning our elementary and middle level students to school for more days a week. There are several reasons for this. First and foremost, schools have not proven to be super spreader sites as initially feared over the summer months. The low positivity rate in our schools as demonstrated via surveillance monitoring is reflective of this. The depth and breadth of work to this transition is extensive and we want to be sure to allocate enough time for a thoughtful process in each school site. Embedded in this work is our capacity to remain remote ready and our ability to pivot quickly if conditions warrant. As with other decisions, we are tethered closely to a framework for maintaining health and safety of all our buildings' occupants.

- **Positive case** - The positive case at BUHS that I reported yesterday reinforced the importance of answering calls from the school or district. In the event that close contact with an active COVID-19 case took place during the school day, school officials will be the ones making the initial outreach to impacted individuals as well as sharing any quarantine guidance from the Department of Health. The High School was able to quickly inform the individuals yesterday because calls were answered and returned. This advice has been consistent with what has been distributed from the Department of Health.

I thank you for the continued support, understanding, and flexibility as we continue to navigate the school year. We value the faith and trust that you have placed in us and recognize the significance of this.

Stay safe and be well,

Andy Skarzynski
Superintendent of Schools
Windham Southeast Supervisory Union