

1/22/2021

Good Afternoon Parents,

I hope this finds you well. We entered this week celebrating and honoring the legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and witnessed the swearing in President Biden and Vice President Harris. Even amidst concerns about further violence, we were able to see the pomp and circumstance, albeit modified, that is associated with a Presidential Inauguration. The peaceful transition of power is a hallmark of democracy and we were reminded this week of the optimism and promise that is associated with a new Presidency. I shared with our staff that this is compelling to those with even the slightest bit of interest in history. For those, like myself, who have been or are a Social Studies or History teacher, it was an amazing sight to see.

Our school leaders and teachers have been busy preparing for the second semester next week. The increased number of students attending school will mean that buses are more crowded this semester than the first semester. In some cases, students may be sitting two to a seat. Schools will be developing seating charts. Masks will be required and windows will be opened at the front and rear of the bus to create airflow. Please continue to share with your child that it will be colder on the bus ride to and from school and that coats and other winter gear should be worn. Our goal is to have monitors on all our buses and our transportation provider, Kuzmeskus, is still looking for bus monitors to fill a few remaining positions.

As we prepare the start of the second semester, we want to reassure families that we are still focusing on the safety of all our buildings' occupants. Our emphasis has been on following the guidance from the Agency of Education and the Vermont Department of Health in classroom spacing, grouping, and building operations. While our focus has been on returning students in grades K-8 to four days a week of in person instruction, staffing and space considerations in Dummerston and Putney will have an impact on our seventh and eighth grade students in those schools. School Principals will communicate their plans directly to families.

Our schools are continuing to participate in staff surveillance testing and monitoring in a joint effort from the Agency of Education and the Department of Health. All staff participation is voluntary and the information we receive has allowed us to gauge our efforts in our schools. While the latest surge of the virus is abating, we are vigilant in examining the latest infection rates and reports. Today, we were notified that our bus drivers will also have access to this testing.

As noted in the past, we are refining our methods of reporting when there are positive cases in schools and will be using a strategy whereby school families are informed of cases that were present in the building. Close contacts will continue to be identified for quarantine notification. Based upon feedback from our community providers, we will limit the number of district-wide

notices we are sending when there is a positive case in a school. This week we have only one reported case at Green Street School as of this writing.

In addition to notifying individual school families, there are two additional options to monitor the presence of active cases in schools. Our COVID dashboard ([here](#)) is updated as we receive information of a positive case that has been in school. The Health Department also publishes a weekly report of positive cases in school ([here](#)). The document provides helpful information but it is long as every school in the state is listed. Thus far there have not been any cases of community spread in school.

This week the Windham Southeast School District approved a statement regarding the riots in Washington D.C. on January 6th. The message is a strong statement of our beliefs as a district and both WSESD and WSESU have approved and endorsed it. It is as follows:

“To WSESD Students, Staff and Administration ~

With you, members of the WSESD Board witnessed the shameful events unfold at the Capitol Building. Like you, we feel anger, frustration, and sadness at this violent, unlawful spectacle, an affront not only to the Constitution and the rule of law, but also to human decency and moral duty. As a body, we are committed to the social, emotional and academic growth of students who will reach their fullest potential as members of society. Our hope and expectation is that the events of January 6th will offer an opportunity for all of us to reflect on the essential lessons of civic responsibility, racial equality and moral integrity. It is an opportunity to reconsider what it means to live in a society in which law comes before our political preferences and an opportunity to realize that the preservation of our democracy depends on an educated citizenry. As a school board, we thank and will continue to support the administration, staff and superintendent who work so passionately to achieve this end.”

We strive as a district to create a place of inclusivity, respect, tolerance, equity, justice, and belonging. As so many have shared, this work is a journey and not a destination. This journey is adeptly and optimistically captured by poet Amanda Gorman who shared an original piece written for Inauguration called “The Hill We Climb.” It is well worth the time to view. One of the many online links is [here](#).

Thank you for your continued support and understanding.

Andy

Andrew Skarzynski
Superintendent of Schools
Windham Southeast Supervisory Union

