

January 15, 2021

Good Afternoon Parents,

As with every week, I hope this finds you well. We head into a long weekend that celebrates and recognizes the legacy of Martin Luther King Jr. and look toward a week in which our next President and Vice President are inaugurated and take the Oath of Office. We are the midst of historic times and comparisons between the civil rights era and our current moment are unavoidable. We must continue to remind ourselves that, just as we emerged from those tumultuous years, we will come out of this stronger.

Our second semester planning continues. Our schools are finalizing class lists and connecting with families and we are looking forward to the start of the second semester. There has been a significant amount of work accomplished and we appreciate the patience that we have been given as we pull this all together. As with everything else, we are learning to quickly adjust and adapt to changing virus reports and being able to quickly pivot to remote options will still remain an integral part of our work.

The increased number of students in the schools during the second semester may mean that there are some changes with our busing. Just like in the first semester, buses will have less physical distancing than our classrooms. Our transportation provider, Kuzmeskus, has been outstanding to work with and they are in the process of finalizing all our routes. For the purpose of transparency, I am able to share the following:

- There will be more students on the buses in the second semester than in the first. Some buses may have as many as 40 students on them.
- The increased number of students on the buses is a combination of multiple system level factors that have been impacted by the pandemic such as a shortage of drivers.
- All buses will have a monitor on them.
- Each bus will have at least ten open spaces to provide space for the safety of the driver and monitor.
- Buses will have the front and rear windows lowered four inches during all rides. This creates an air flow in the bus. Students will need to be prepared to dress warmly on the bus.

Transportation is one of the more difficult parts of pandemic planning. We recognize the challenges that this may provide and encourage families to use alternate options if possible.

We are working on revising our weekly update to include additional information about the number of positive COVID-19 cases in our schools. We are further refining the communication path we use to ensure our COVID dashboard is updated more regularly. Our schools will continue to share information as necessary as well.

From Our COVID-19 Coordinator:

We are frequently asked, "What are you going to do to ensure the safety of the students and staff with increasing covid 19 cases in the state?" This is an excellent question.

WSESU personnel and the Kuzmeskus bus company have been following all the Health and Safety Guidelines to decrease the risk of transmitting the Covid19 virus. We follow the social distancing recommendations of students grade K through 12, we wear masks, follow cleaning standards, and all other recommendations from the Vt Department of Health. We have a Health and Safety Committee which met all last summer to develop safety guidelines from the VT Department of Health, the CDC, and the Agency of Education. We have a nurse in each school to help staff and students follow guidelines to decrease risk and provide education to students, families, and staff. Our website and school newsletters regularly publish updates for health and safety information, All students and staff are screened for symptoms and travel each morning before entering school. Anyone with symptoms or the need to quarantine because of travel is sent home.

We have continued to follow these guidelines in school while the Covid cases have been increasing in the community since Halloween . WSESU has had a few cases of individuals in the school reported Covid positive. The infections came from other places outside of the school and we haven't had any spread in school at this time. The Covid positivity rate in school is lower than in the community. We have teacher and staff surveillance Covid testing once a month since November. This has indicated all are actions have been protecting us from infection while in school. We are always looking at data from the Vt Dept of Health to guide our decisions and health practices to keep students and staff healthy.

I hope that you have a safe, healthy, and peaceful weekend.

Andy

Andrew Skarzynski
Superintendent of Schools
Windham Southeast Supervisory Union