

1/29/2021

Good Afternoon Parents,

I hope this finds you well. Yesterday we greeted many of our elementary and middle level students back to four days a week of in-person instruction. For some, it was their first day back in a building since March 13, 2020. The enthusiasm among staff and students was amazing and it felt like the first day of school, albeit with a bit more snow, all over again. This transition was the product of weeks of planning on the part of our school leaders, teachers, and staff and we are grateful for their commitment in this work.

As you may have determined, I try to spend time outdoors for reflection, contemplation, peace, and perspective. Last week, as I hiked up a ski trail to the top of a mountain, I stopped to look around. The snow hung perfectly on the tree branches and the sun occasionally broke through the clouds to illuminate any ice that coated it. I rarely take out my phone to take pictures but there was just something in that space of time that I wanted to capture. For those that enjoy the snow, it was a perfect setting. The serenity caused me to pause and think again about the significance of our profession and how fortunate we are to be able to engage in a similar practice in our daily work. If we allow ourselves the opportunity to be present, we get the chance to step back and witness the beauty in the moment, whether that is with a student discovering something for the first time, the 'aha' with a new practice, or simply watching a community come together to meet the needs of its students. It is truly remarkable.

In December, I asked our Principals to report on the contributions and donations their schools and students received since the start of the school year. The intention was to acknowledge the tremendous community support that has been so needed and valuable. A robust list was presented by every school. Since then, our schools have continued to receive contributions from local, state, and regional entities, including the donations of mittens by Gordini for every student at Academy School. As I mentioned above, we should all pause and reflect with gratitude on the amazing commitment of our community and their support of students' success.

Today's cold weather is a good opportunity to remind parents that our buses will be operating with open windows due to COVID mitigation reasons. Please be mindful to ensure that students are prepared for chillier than normal conditions on the bus because of this.

While our elementary schools and BAMS welcomed students back to four days a week of in-person instruction, our present plan has students in seventh and eighth grade in Dummerston and Putney returning to four days a week of in-person instruction after February break. BUHS has started the planning process to return students to two days a week of in-person instruction after February break. These three scenarios highlight the challenges faced in the planning efforts and are reflective of hours and hours of strategizing by our school leadership and teachers.

As I mentioned last week, we are transitioning our COVID notification to our school sites. Schools will continue notifying families of positive cases as well as assist with quarantine notification. Similarly, we will update our COVID dashboard regularly. We will no longer send district wide communication around positive cases. This is being done for a number of reasons. First, the notice of any positive case is usually associated with a heightened sense of anxiety and worry. Our concern is to avoid doing this needlessly at a time where we are all undergoing more stress than usual with the pandemic. Secondly, we would like to minimize the barrage of emails and communication you receive so that you have the chance to focus on those that are important to read. I will also share the number of cases in this weekly email. This week there were no notices of positive cases in our schools.

The Vermont Department of Health School report on positive cases is [here](#). This table is updated weekly and provides readers the opportunity to review the weekly data on transmission of COVID-19 in schools.

Next week we will acknowledge Black Lives Matter at School Week. Started in 2016, [Black Lives Matter at School](#) is a national coalition of educators, parents, and students organizing for racial justice in education. They encourage community organizations and unions to join their annual week of action during the first week of February each year. During this week, schools across the country and in our district work in solidarity to launch a [shared set of lessons](#) and examine their schools' policies in pursuit of social and educational equity for all students.

WSESD will be sponsoring activities throughout the month to highlight our Diversity Equity theme: Justice for All. This will include read alouds, parent chats, a performance by [Taina Asili](#), and other classroom activities.

Thank you for your continued support, understanding, and flexibility.

Best,

Andy

Andrew Skarzynski
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