



SCHOOL DISTRICT OF THE CHATHAMS

Office of the Superintendent

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January 25, 2022

Dear Parent,

I am writing to advise you of adjustments we will be making to some of our Covid-related protocols.

This week marks the midpoint of the school year. We have now had the opportunity to evaluate how our health and safety protocols have functioned, both during the fall and now during the past six weeks of the Omicron surge we have experienced. In addition, the New Jersey Department of Health has issued multiple revisions to its school-based guidance since January 1. Finally, parallel to the CDC and NJDOH, other organizations dedicated to the health and welfare of children have updated their recommendations to schools to reflect the realities of Omicron and the current state of the pandemic in relation to schools.

Among the updated recommendations for schools are those published by the [Children's Hospital of Philadelphia](#) (CHOP) earlier this month. These recommendations largely align with updates from the CDC and NJDOH in that they reduce the length of isolation time for individuals testing positive for Covid from 10 days to 5 days (a change we have already implemented). However, CHOP also advises that students who are exposed to Covid at school need NOT quarantine if they remain asymptomatic and adhere to masking while in school. This recommendation reflects what we have experienced as a school district during the first half of this year. At the K-8 level, where almost all of our quarantining has occurred due to the lack of vaccine eligibility at the beginning of the year, as of January 14 we had initiated over 200 student quarantines for exposure to Covid at school. Of these 200+ quarantines, only two students went on to test positive for Covid within their quarantine period. In other words, for every 100 or more students we quarantine due to exposure at school, only one is turning out to test positive as a result of school exposure.

Please note that this does not necessarily indicate that there has been no transmission of the virus at school. It is likely that we have had transmission, but by the time a student becomes ill, their parent reports their illness to us, and our staff members go back several days to contact trace and identify close contacts, the students who may have become exposed and infected are already sick. The students who have been in school without symptoms are not the ones who materialize as infections, even though they are the ones who quarantine.

As you know, the goal of our Board of Education and school district as a whole over the course of the past two years has been to provide as much in-person, normalized schooling and school experiences to all students as possible. This goal is vital to the academic, social, and emotional well-being of students. Given the latest recommendations from CHOP, as well as our own data regarding our experience thus far this school year, beginning today we will no longer initiate school-based quarantines due to exposure to Covid cases in the school setting. Instead, we will advise parents if their child has been identified as a close contact of a Covid-positive individual in the school setting and remind parents to monitor their child for symptoms. Any student who is symptomatic for Covid-like illness should NOT be sent to school. Students who are symptomatic should remain home while sick, test for Covid, and follow the isolation parameters currently in place. We ask all parents utilizing at-home tests to report a positive result for their child immediately and to provide a photo of the test result to the school nurse as verification. We believe that moving to this system of symptom monitoring and case reporting will continue to keep our schools safe while enabling all children who are healthy and feeling well to be in school.

Finally, please note that our own experience and also the recommendations from CHOP treat household exposure differently than school exposure. Household exposures are more likely to result in transmission than school exposures. Therefore, if there is a positive case in a student's household, a student who is not up to date with vaccinations should continue to quarantine for five days and may then return to school if asymptomatic on Day 6, assuming they were able to isolate away from the positive household member. If they are unable to isolate away from the positive household member, they should begin their quarantine on the final day they have had contact with that household member.

We will update our various policies over the coming week(s) to reflect these changes and we hope that their net effect is to enable as many students as possible to continue to enjoy all of the academic, social, and mental health benefits provided by school while ensuring a safe environment. Thank you as always for your cooperation.

Sincerely,

Mike LaSusa