



October 7th, 2021

Dear WCDSB Community,

As we journey into the Thanksgiving Weekend, I am very reflective of the fact that this month and this season is characterized by gratitude. In these sometimes very challenging times, it is so very easy to feel daunted or get discouraged. So, it is important that we take the time to pause and take note of the many blessings in our lives. We truly are just so blessed to live in a country and community that provides us easy access to the supports we need to navigate this pandemic, and that for the most part we are here for one another – supporting one another and journeying through this time together, guided by the love of Christ.

This letter brings a few important updates of which we would like you to be aware and it also affords me an opportunity to share my thanks to each of you. First of all – to our staff. This is – for many of you – your third year working in a pandemic reality. Your many efforts, your care, compassion, resilience, commitment and passion for your chosen vocation have not gone unnoticed and are deeply appreciated. You are making a difference in students' lives, regardless of your role. To our parents and community members – thank you for your trust and for walking with us, on a journey of accompaniment as we all strive to do our best to serve our young people. And to our students – we applaud your grit and your spirit as you work through some challenging times, while you strive to be your best selves.

Now to our brief updates:

Screening

Please know that one of the most important things you do each and every day is to complete the screening tool before you as a staff member or student (or parent of a student) arrive at school. Any individual who fails the screener or who is symptomatic in any way should not be reporting to school. That is part of our collective responsibility to one another.

<https://covid-19.ontario.ca/school-screening/>

Vaccination

While we do not actively promote vaccination in our schools, we are told and do know from all the provincial science tables, the Chief Medical Officers of Health – provincial and local, and our lived experience, that vaccination is one of the most important decisions we can make in support of a healthy learning environment for all. We encourage all eligible staff and students to carefully



consider this option based on the advice we are receiving. We do not have information yet about the option for our 5-11 year olds to be vaccinated but progress is being made, and as soon as we have an update, we will share it with you.

Rapid Testing

There has been much in the media of late about rapid testing. On Tuesday October 5th the Chief Medical Officer of Health for the province indicated that there would be targeted use of this strategy. It will only be used where there is an indication it is needed – specifically if high case counts or transmission is being observed, and/or low vaccination rates are known. They are not used when and where cases are low as the risk of false positives and the potential to administer the test incorrectly, outweigh its potential benefit. We will always work with and defer to public health for their advice on this matter. Currently our case counts are low and rates of transmission in schools, extremely low, so it is not being advised at this time. When advised that it would be an effective strategy, we will support its use for our asymptomatic staff and students – who may wish to partake on a voluntary basis.

Sports / Athletics

We have been pleased to see the return of athletics and sport to our schools and for inter-scholastic play to have returned for those age 12 and older. The criteria to play is full vaccination and/or proof of a negative test. This strategy is being used in a very targeted way for students who are not able to use our other usual strategies to ensure their safety – that is – they are unable to ensure masking and social distancing. We are enormously grateful to our (coaching) staff for supporting this “return to play/competition”.

Masking

Students from K to 12 will continue to wear masks. An exemption form is required for any student in grades 1 to 12 who is unable to wear a mask. We continue to strongly support this precaution, as Public Health and provincial guidance suggests that outside of vaccination, it is our best strategy to promote a healthy and safe environment for all. We ask you to continue working with us to support students in understanding why we wear a mask and how to do so safely.

Potential Travel

For those who are vaccinated, your minds may be turning to travel. We wish to point out that according to current guidelines, while students under 12, travelling with vaccinated parents do not have to quarantine per se, they are not allowed to return to school until 14 days from return have passed. This guidance is found on our webpage. This is federal policy we are sharing.

<https://www.wcdsb.ca/covid-19-student-screening-and-testing/>



Please review our full [Operational Guidelines](#) to ensure you understand how we are continuing to ensure a safe and happy school experience for all.

We are truly looking forward to a year that allows us to embrace a renewed love of learning, within our faith-based communities. We remain ever grateful for your continued support and remain ready and willing to assist you as we continue to navigate these times. Once again – on behalf of the Senior Team – we extend our very best wishes for a restful Thanksgiving weekend. Please celebrate conscious of the precautions Public Health asks us to observe. May God continue to bless you, your families and your Thanksgiving gatherings.

Sincerely



Loretta Notten

Director of Education

