

January 17, 2022

Dear West Salem Middle and High School Staff and Families,

As we are sure you are aware, with the latest surge of the Omicron variant, we are feeling the impacts here within our district. We are happy to be continuing our in-person instruction, and doing everything possible to keep our doors open for face-to-face learning. The number of positive cases with our staff members has stabilized since returning from our holiday break, but our student numbers have continued to rise. Over the past two weeks, the number of students who have tested positive for COVID has increased to points that we haven't seen yet in the district. With this recent uptick, our modified mitigation strategies are not enough to reduce spread within our district. In order to meet our primary goal of maintaining in-person instruction, we are going to transition and use our full extent of mitigation measures and **require masking, with the preference on medical-grade masks instead of cloth, when indoors for all students, staff, and visitors at the middle and high schools beginning on Tuesday, January 18th.** We will reevaluate this decision on **Friday, January 28th** to make a determination going forward. If this recent uptick subsides, we will return to optional masking.

With the increase of positive cases of students within our buildings, I would like to notify you that it is highly likely your child(ren) will be or could be considered a close contact at any point when they are on campus. Just as it has been informed of us as adults to assume that we are in close contact when in public, assume that your child is exposed here at school.

Following trends in other areas, we can expect to see this number possibly continue to go up in the short term. With the increased cases in our building and the exposure that is occurring, the process of contact tracing is diverting staff time and resources from efforts of helping to assist and support students and families and is not sustainable. Because of this, we are going to discontinue contact tracing. As a parent/guardian, you will no longer be receiving a message about your child's possible exposure. We are confident that discontinuing contact tracing will provide staff with the capacity to monitor actual cases of COVID more effectively. We ask that you continue to help and assist by increasing your vigilance in monitoring your child(ren) for symptoms and keeping them home if they are ill. If your child(ren) does develop symptoms, please inform your child's building, stay home, and get tested. Our onsite testing is only offering PCR tests at this time, so any rapid test would need to be done at another testing location.

We appreciate your continued help and assistance in keeping your child(ren) and others as healthy as possible; this is a community effort! By keeping your child(ren) home when sick, reporting positive tests to your school, and continuing to be mindful of those around, we will see this recent trend subside quickly. With all of your continued help and support, we've got this!

Thank you, be well, and take care!

Ryan G. Rieber  
Superintendent

Dr. Nicole Hennessy  
District Doctor

Kate Brohmer  
District Nurse