



Thomas F. Aubin
Superintendent of Schools

August 16, 2021

Dear Westport School Community:

It seemed like only yesterday that we were celebrating the end of a very successful 2021 school year. As a school community, we came together and overcame significant challenges to provide our students with the quality education they so richly deserve. As a result of your efforts, we kept our school community safe in the process. And with the widespread distribution of vaccinations in the spring, there was a collective hope that the start of the 2022 school year would bring a much-desired reprieve from the challenges posed by the pandemic.

Regrettably, this is not the case.

As you may be aware, school committees across Massachusetts are charged with making policy decisions regarding mask-wearing for students, staff, and visitors when in attendance at any of our schools. After a lengthy discussion that included public input, the Westport School Committee voted on **August 12, 2021**, to approve an optional face-mask policy. To be more specific, the face-mask policy approved at this meeting entails the following:

- Masks are ***strongly recommended*** for all students in Pre-K to Grade 6
- The committee ***strongly recommends*** any students, staff, or visitors who are ***not*** vaccinated wear a mask
- Masks ***will be required*** while transporting on a bus or when in attendance at the nurse's office.
- The committee will continue to ***review weekly*** health metrics for the community and work closely with the Westport Board of Health to determine if adjustments to our mask policy are required
- Masks ***will not be required*** outdoors
- Masks ***will not be required*** during snack time and lunch

Be advised that as of August 16, 2021, the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education has not approved "remote" learning in Massachusetts schools (exclusive of virtual schools), and the expectation is that all learning will take place "in-person." To ensure the safest learning environment for our school community, the district leadership will monitor air quality at all of our schools. Additionally, the district will continue to utilize UV technology and HEPA air purification as mitigation strategies to help stop the spread of the virus. It is worthy to note that throughout the 2021 school year, the district reported only two in-school transmission cases. We hope through our mitigation strategies that we can have equal success in the 2022 school year. We will be sending our community more updates as we get closer to the opening of school for students on September 7, 2021

In conclusion, we will be dealing with the ramifications of the current pandemic for some time to come. As such, the School Committee and administration will be reviewing the local Covid statistics every week. The Covid protocols will be added to our School Committee agendas throughout the 2022 school year, understanding that we must be prepared to pivot our policies and practices based on the pandemic conditions.

I wish you a healthy and successful school year.

Sincerely,

Thomas F. Aubin

WCS Back-to-School FAQs August 16, 2021

1. What mitigation strategies are being implemented by WCS to keep students and staff safe?

To replicate the success that the WCS schools had during the 2020-21 school year, the following steps will be taken at all WCS:

- Each school will be utilizing both UV technology and HEPA air purification to mitigate to maximize air exchanges in learning and common areas.
- The district will continue to monitor air quality and make adjustments where necessary.
- Outdoor learning activities will be maximized at all schools.
- Social distancing will be implemented to the greatest extent possible.
- High touch areas will be cleaned and disinfected regularly.
- Encourage frequent hand washing.

2. I am vaccinated. Will I need to wear a mask in the upcoming school year?

No. Masks are strongly recommended for all Westport Community Schools students and staff, vaccinated and unvaccinated effective August 12, 2021.

Face-masks are not required: (1) when outside; or (2) when an individual works alone or in a segregated space (e.g., cubicle).

3. Will WCS require additional physical distancing when we return to school?

No. We will do our best to maintain social distancing throughout our learning and common areas but there are no other physical distancing requirements for the upcoming school year.

4. Will there be assigned seating this year?

Yes. Whenever possible, seats should be assigned, and we recommend keeping students desks rather than tables for now. In some cases, it may be necessary to use tables for varied instruction. We must continue our contact tracing efforts, so assigned seating in classrooms and on buses remains important.

5. My child is immunocompromised, and in-person learning does not feel safe to me. Is there a remote option this year?

Unfortunately, remote learning is no longer an option in the upcoming school year per the Commissioner of Education. Please refer to the DESE COVID-19 guidance issued on May 27, 2021, page 4:

Districts will no longer be able to offer remote learning as a standard learning model. As noted above, districts and schools will be required to be in-person, full-time, five days a week this fall. Pathways that existed before the pandemic for offering virtual learning to individual students in limited cases will remain available to districts and schools. These include home/hospital tutoring programs due to a documented medical condition, 3 single district virtual schools, and other narrow circumstances.

6. Will Westport Public Schools participate in a pooled saliva testing program?

We are working with our professional nursing staff and the Westport Board of Health to develop a testing regimen that works best for our school community. More information will follow.

7. Are all Westport Community Schools staff members and volunteers required to be vaccinated?

Currently, no. At present, approximately 60% of our staff have answered a vaccination survey, with 94.6% of the respondents vaccinated. We will continue to monitor vaccination rates.

8. Will Westport Community Schools host another vaccination clinic? If yes, when?

In collaboration with the Westport Board of Health, the district will determine the likelihood of a future vaccination clinic based on community demand.

9. Will masks be required on school buses?

Yes. Passengers and drivers must wear a mask on school buses at all times. In addition, all Westport Community School buses must have windows open at least 4 inches at all times. **A federal order to require masks on public transportation and school buses remains in effect.**

10. What are the current travel restrictions? Will I be able to travel out of state without a Quarantine?

Massachusetts COVID-19 Travel Guidance suggests that if you are vaccinated there are no restrictions on domestic travel, and you can travel freely. The CDC recommends unvaccinated people to obtain a viral test 3-5 days after travel and to self-quarantine for a full 7 days after travel. Since children under the age of 12 are ineligible for a vaccine, we anticipate that many families will have questions about the rules. We ask all WCS families and staff to follow the State's travel guidance. Qualifying special conditions include serious family emergencies/illnesses, deaths, and custody arrangements. If you have questions, please contact your principal or school nurse.

11. What is the procedure if a student or staff member is sick and experiencing symptoms, such as fever, cough, or runny nose?

Students and Families:

Before coming to school or getting on the bus: Families should assess their child's state of wellness before leaving home for school. It is expected that each family will assess their children every day for any symptoms before the child comes to school.

If the student has any of the COVID-19 symptoms below, they should stay home from school. The family should notify the school that the child will be absent and the reason for the absence. The school nurse will follow-up with the family regarding the child's symptoms, when the child was seen by a medical professional and any testing that was done. The child can return to school once cleared by the school nurse.

School Personnel:

If any staff member has any symptoms, they should call their supervisor and report the symptoms and stay home from school. Staff should follow up with their Health Care Provider for further evaluation and testing. They will be allowed to return to school based on their symptoms, further evaluation, and clearance from the school nurse. Staff who become ill while at school will be sent home immediately. COVID symptoms are listed below.

COVID Symptoms

According to the CDC website, people with COVID-19 have had a wide range of symptoms reported – ranging from mild symptoms to severe illness. Symptoms may appear 2-14 days after exposure to the virus. Anyone can have mild to severe symptoms. This list does not include all possible symptoms. CDC will continue to update this list as we learn more about COVID-19. Older adults and people who have severe underlying medical conditions like heart or lung disease or diabetes seem to be at higher risk for developing more serious complications from COVID-19 illness. People with these symptoms may have COVID-19: Fever or chills, cough, shortness of breath or difficulty breathing, fatigue, muscle or body aches, headache, new loss of taste or smell, sore throat, congestion or runny nose, nausea or vomiting, diarrhea.

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/symptoms-testing/symptoms.html>

It is the policy of the Westport Community Schools to maintain a learning and working environment that is free from harassment, violence or discrimination based on actual or perceived race, color, creed, religion, national origin, sex/gender, marital status, homelessness, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, age, family care leave status, pregnancy or any condition related to pregnancy, or military/veteran status.