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December 22, 2021

Dear SOMSD Community,

As we enter into the holiday and winter break the District, in collaboration with our local health departments (both Maplewood and South Orange) and school nurses, has been closely monitoring our community COVID-19 numbers. In consultation with these stakeholders and based on NJDOH guidelines, we are committed to make any changes to our protocols and delivery of instruction if needed based on the numbers of positive cases.

Therefore, post-winter break, in order to protect the health of staff and students, we will begin the 2022 school year with virtual instruction. **Beginning on Tuesday, January 4, ALL students and staff will transition to all-virtual instruction. All staff and students will return to school for in-person instruction on Monday, January 10, 2022.**

Thankfully, there has been no evidence of in-school COVID transmission; however, our local community transmission is high and the cases are rising rapidly. In addition, as we shared in our December 9 community update [<https://bit.ly/3oF6wPn>] according to the recently released COVID Activity Level Index (CALI) report for the state of NJ, the entire state is now considered as HIGH transmission.

The recent spike in verified cases in our schools have resulted in hundreds of students shifting to virtual learning due to quarantine. Additionally, dozens of staff members have also had to be isolated due to break through cases. The operations of our schools have suffered greatly, forcing many class coverage shortages and unplanned consolidation of classes. Like many other school districts, we have seen a consistent trend, after each of our school breaks, both Thanksgiving and our fall break in early November there has been a sharp increase in our student/staff population of COVID cases (you can view the District's COVID dashboard for data: <https://bit.ly/SOMSD-Dashboard>).

We understand that this may be a hardship for some of our families and can be disruptive to student engagement; however, the health and safety of our students and staff is paramount. To assist our community in reducing the possibility of additional cases we believe this a prudent and necessary decision as many families will be gathering over the winter break and also traveling to see loved ones.

On Tuesday, January 4, your child will follow their normal/typical academic schedule during virtual learning and should sign into their CANVAS account to access assignments and google meet links for their classes. Students who do not join their class via the google meet link will be marked absent. Some additional important information is below:

- All after-school clubs will be held virtually;
- Bagged 'to-go' school lunches will be provided at the cafeteria doors and available for pick-up during students' normal lunch hours;
- If a District Chromebook was not picked up for your child, you will have to email info@somsd.k12.nj.us to arrange for a device. [Please note that the District office that distributes Chromebook devices is closed during the holiday break (December 24 through January 3), so pick up will not be possible until January 4]

Important COVID-19 Information:



- As the District Holiday break is coming up and the District is closed from December 24 - January 3, during this break if your child tests positive as per laboratory test (home-based tests are not valid), please email the principal as per usual procedure (*please also be mindful that building administrators are also on holiday break with their families and will not be as responsive to email communications*). If you receive a positive result on a home based test, please get a PCR lab based test to confirm. All lab based COVID tests are reported to the local health department and a contact tracer will contact you. Contact the local health department if you do not hear from a contact tracer within 24 hours of receiving your positive test result. Contact your healthcare provider for medical advice.
- If your child develops any COVID-19 symptoms, please contact your health care provider and request the child be tested for COVID-19. Find COVID-19 testing sites: essexcovid.org.
- For UNVACCINATED INDIVIDUALS close contact quarantine is now 14 days from the last date of exposure and there is NO test out option. Please view the District website for information: [\[bit.ly/3gwT5N2\]](https://bit.ly/3gwT5N2).
- Travel guidelines remain the same - if families travel over the holiday break with unvaccinated children they must quarantine for 7 - 10 days depending on COVID test results. Please view the 2021-22 SOMSD Return to School Guidebook page 10 <https://bit.ly/SOMSDFallGuidebook>
- The District's MediMobile COVID-19 testing will be open on Wed., December 22 from 4 pm - 6 pm, at the BOE building, 525 Academy Street, Maplewood, District Meeting Room. (Note: Due to the holiday break, MediMobile will NOT offer testing on 12/25, 12/29 or 1/1). Please visit [\[bit.ly/C19Test_Vaccine\]](https://bit.ly/C19Test_Vaccine) for more information on testing and vaccination. **We are working with our vendor in an effort to add additional testing dates for our community during the week of January 4. Once confirmed we will send out this information under separate cover.**

Your actions will affect how well our community prevents the spread of the virus. Please remind your child(ren) to take these steps:

- Wear a mask in indoor public settings;
- Limit their interactions to a small circle of friends and family. It is recommended to test prior to any large gatherings, especially if it includes anyone who is high risk.
- Keep your distance from others. Wear a mask when you cannot maintain social distance;
- Get tested for COVID-19 if you are experiencing symptoms.
- Wash your hands, cover your cough, and keep up your best hygiene and sanitation.
- The District strongly encourages vaccination; if your child is not yet vaccinated, please consider doing so.

The health and safety of our students is our priority and as we continue to monitor cases locally we will make any necessary adjustments on a case by case basis. A follow-up communication will be sent to families with additional updates prior to our return to school for virtual learning.

Thank you in advance for your cooperation and understanding.

Dr. Ronald G. Taylor, Superintendent of Schools