



STAFFORD COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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Office of the Superintendent

December 18, 2020

Dear SCPS Families and Staff,

It has been a few weeks since I have formally written to our school community. However, on a daily basis I continue to hear from many and I appreciate your feedback and comments on the decisions we have made or on our future Return to School Plans. Unfortunately, the COVID-19 virus remains a significant health issue and the local, state, and national data indicates the spread in communities is worsening at this time. Our school system continues to follow all of the health mitigation strategies that the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and the Virginia Department of Health (VDH) have recommended and this has resulted in very few school-based COVID-19 transmissions.

The school system monitors three important data points to help assess our effectiveness in maintaining a safe learning and teaching environment. First, we monitor our success in following the CDC and VDH recommended health mitigation strategies. We also track our ability to accurately manage contact tracing for those who have tested positive, including the number of school-based transmissions. Finally, we closely monitor our staffing patterns to make sure we have the personnel needed to provide instruction and critical operations such as transportation and food service.

The vast majority of those who tested positive for COVID-19 and required self quarantine have been due to community-based transmissions that have impacted our school system. It is critically important that all of us who are reading this letter follow the health mitigation strategies that are described below. It is very important that during this extended holiday period we pay close attention to the recommendations about travel and social gatherings.

Guidance for January 4-11, 2021

It has been decided that from January 4th to January 11th we will return to a virtual learning environment for all students except for those students with an IEP who come in to our schools through Plan C and those who participate in the Internet Cafes. This action is necessary to increase the chances that students and staff who may have traveled or been exposed to COVID-19 during the winter break will complete the self-quarantine recommendations before returning to our school buildings.

Winter Sports Update

Based on [Governor Northam's Executive Order 72](#), and the initial recommendations from the Virginia Department of Health (VDH) and the Virginia High School League (VHSL), I made the decision last week to postpone winter sports until I was provided further clarification. I wanted to be clear that our student athletes would not be at greater risk based on the VHSL initial guidance and that there wasn't a conflict between the Governor's order and VHSL directive.

On Monday, the VHSL [reissued guidance to conform with the intent of the Governor's Executive Order](#) that face masks are *"strongly encouraged" but not required*. After receiving this clarification, we will allow tryouts for high school winter sports to begin on Monday, January 11th, 2021. Middle school tryouts are also currently scheduled to begin January 11.

Second Semester Planning Survey For Secondary Students

Yesterday, middle and high school families received a survey that asks them to select their preferred educational model and transportation requirements for their students in the second semester. [Families may elect either a hybrid or 100 percent virtual model for their students.](#) Please remember that this survey must be completed by January 6, 2021 so that we may properly plan for the second semester.

Remain Vigilant with Health Mitigation Practices

I want to remind our community of those health mitigation strategies we have in place to slow the spread of COVID-19. Upon arrival at any SCPS facility, all visitors and staff must answer health screening questions and have their temperature checked. While on site, individuals are to maintain six-foot distances whenever possible and wear a face covering at all times in our buildings unless you have medical exemption, are eating, or are in an enclosed room by themselves. Hand sanitizer stations, directional signage, and physical barriers are in place in all buildings. Additional air purifiers are being installed in all building clinics, isolation rooms, and front office spaces. I invite you to watch our [Return to School video series](#) for more information on our cleaning protocols and the safety measures in place for our buildings and buses.

Families are asked to screen their students for COVID-19 symptoms prior to sending them to school. Students and staff who do not feel well are to remain home and contact their building administrator. Staff and students are to self-quarantine after exposure in accordance with the Centers for Disease Control and Virginia Department of Health guidelines. The Rappahannock Area Health District is strongly recommending that schools continue to utilize the 14 day quarantine period when possible in order to minimize the risk of transmission in the school setting. This is still considered the gold standard for quarantine. We continue to review and update these protocols to ensure the highest level of safety for all our students and staff.

As families and staff plan for their activities over the winter holiday, we want to call attention to recently published recommendations from both the [Centers for Disease Control](#) (CDC) and the [Virginia Department of Health](#) (VDH) regarding travel. Both agencies strongly encourage individuals to avoid travel if possible, and to maintain safe practices (distancing and face coverings) in their personal activities especially with persons who do not live in your household. VDH further recommends that anyone who travels out of state restrict themselves to essential activities only for ten days after returning (which can be shortened to seven days with a negative COVID-19 test) while continuing to monitor for symptoms over the full 14 days.

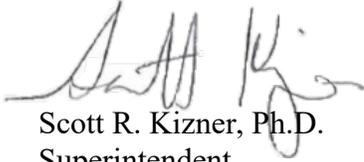
SCPS will not require either students or staff to quarantine upon return from out of state travel, but we ask everyone to take the recommendations offered by these health agencies seriously. As you celebrate the holidays, [please continue to follow good health practices to mitigate the spread of COVID-19.](#) If personal travel outside of the area is unavoidable, please consider adjusting your plans so that you will have sufficient time after returning home to limit your non-essential activities for at least one week upon return (ten days if you cannot secure a COVID test) before returning to school.

As I have said since I started to write all of you back in the spring, this year has been and continues to be a year with great challenges. However, I have also seen the best of so many of our staff members. I have witnessed amazing elementary and early childhood instruction in the classrooms, the excitement that takes place in our Career and Technical Education programs, and the passionate teachers, paraprofessionals, and others who are working with our children with special needs and English Learners. I have observed our teachers doing an exceptional job teaching our students in a virtual learning environment and making personal connections with our families and students so they will be engaged and experience success. Our bus drivers and school cafeteria

staff continue to do amazing work so our students can arrive and return safely and those who need a meal have them available. To this day we have distributed over a million meals to our school community. I want to also acknowledge our school counselors, nurses, and other student support staff for reaching out to children and families who benefit from this additional attention and support. Finally, I want to thank our technology, office, custodial, maintenance, and administrative staff for providing support to our teachers and families. We are a team and I am very proud to be part of this remarkable SCPS team.

I wish all of our families and staff members a very happy holiday season and I wish you a safe and healthy New Year. I look forward to communicating with you in 2021. My next letter will be January 22nd unless it is required earlier.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Scott R. Kizner".

Scott R. Kizner, Ph.D.
Superintendent