

Update on Notification Processes - January 14, 2022

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Dear Teaneck Parents/Guardians & Staff,

We are nearly two years into this pandemic, and there's understandably increased stress and anxiety during this incredibly challenging time. Please know how much I appreciate the commitment, patience and cooperation of all of our families and staff as we navigate this latest phase together.

With the COVID-19 Omicron variant having spread so quickly, our current reality has New Jersey averaging over 25,000/day, not including many home testing results. Despite these circumstances, we are actively:

- 1.) Cleaning and disinfecting high contact areas 3 times per day;
- 2.) Staying abreast of latest guidelines set forth by the CDC and the State;
- 3.) Providing virtual instruction for all children in quarantine;
- 4.) Sending out a daily Wellness Check to remind everyone that if you are experiencing any specific symptoms (noted in the email reminder), then you should contact the building principal, immediate supervisor, or school nurse.
- 5.) Keeping our COVID-19 section of the website updated with the latest information including Frequently Asked Questions and other related documents. **NEW: Our Weekly COVID-19 Dashboard provides an at-a-glance view of positive cases, by school, and the total number of students and staff in quarantine. We will also ensure this is posted on each school website.**
- 6.) Receiving, investigating, and following up on all positive COVID-19 cases and all direct contact exposures.

Since January 3, we have had nearly 200 positive cases. As a result, we were hearing from many of you that we are not timely in our follow-up, and that notifications are arriving late. We shared your concerns with the Teaneck Health Department, requesting guidance on how to proceed given the limited internal resources we have to keep up with the current pace of cases.

According to Dr. Gina Miranda Diaz, Teaneck Health Officer, "Based upon the unprecedented transmission rate in Teaneck, NJ (**Red - Very High**), it is apparent that it is impossible to assess all interactions in a classroom. Due to the length of time that children and staff spend together, **all members of the school community are considered close contacts.**"

If we are all considered close contacts, we asked: *how can we manage the many notifications we have been issuing?* As a reminder, per the State's guidelines for the current school year, our district has not required quarantine periods for most "direct contact" students because they are either vaccinated or wear masks (applies to unvaccinated children too). If you have received a "direct contact" letter from the COVID Response Team (CRT), you know *that in the*

majority of cases, our guidance has, and continues to be, that there's nothing for you to do except monitor for symptoms for 10 days and consider testing after 5 days. Additionally, it is taking so long for PCR test results to come in that contact tracing in such cases is nearly impossible.

In consultation with the Teaneck Township Manager and the Teaneck Health Department, we have been advised that, for the next several weeks, we can proceed in the following way:

- 1.) Notifications/letters should focus on positive cases. Any child who tests positive, will receive a formal communication with guidance on the quarantine period and accessing virtual instruction.
- 2.) As Dr. Diaz noted above, in a very high transmission level stage, everyone in the school community is considered close contacts. Therefore, letters will be sent to “direct contacts” only when the CRT deems a specific situation, especially involving unvaccinated children or staff, warrants such notifications.
- 3.) During the next 4-6 weeks, we strongly recommend that everyone monitors for any symptoms and considers weekly rapid/antigen testing. Please do not send your child to school if they have any cold-like symptoms. You should also consider wearing a higher quality mask as cloth masks may not be adequate per the latest recommendations.

In closing, I want to publicly thank our school nurses and the COVID Response Team for all that they have been doing the past few weeks. This is no easy task and the work seems never-ending.

In early February, we will once again re-evaluate our processes and determine what makes the most sense based upon the pandemic status at that time. It is our ultimate goal to keep our children and staff safe and in school. We must partner in this effort if we are going to be successful. Again, I truly appreciate your patience and cooperation.

Sincerely,

Dr. Christopher Irving, Superintendent of Schools