

January 6, 2022

Dear Washington Central Community,

Happy New Year! I hope that you and your family were able to relax and enjoy the break, even in the midst of continued anxiety and uncertainty regarding the Omicron variant.

This week's community letter is going to be somewhat longer than usual given the currently evolving situation regarding our COVID-19 response at the state and local levels. I want to share with you what we know today.

Between the start of the school year and December 22 we had 86 cases of COVID-19 that impacted our schools. As of today, we've had 76 cases since December 22. I am aware that those numbers are staggering for many of us. Specifically, we have had 9 cases at Berlin, 5 cases at Calais, 9 cases at East Montpelier, 6 cases at Rumney, 1 case at Doty, and 46 cases at U-32 since December 22. 44 of these cases tested positive over December break, so there was no school exposure for those cases.

Earlier this week 782 students and staff members participated in surveillance testing: 105 at Berlin, 85 at Calais, 140 at EMES, 70 at Rumney, 60 at Doty, and 322 at U-32. Of those 782 participants, 14 tested positive. We offered another surveillance testing event today. I will report those numbers next week.

A number of people have asked why our schools are not closed during this time of high transmission. The Vermont Agency of Education requires us to be in school for a certain number of days each year. And, to date, the AOE has been very clear that remote learning is not an option this year. During this current phase of the pandemic, there are conditions under which we might need to close a school. For example, if we do not have enough staff members to safely operate our schools or if less than 50% of students are able to attend school (at least 51% of students must physically be present in school for the school day to count toward the annual requirement), we will make a decision to close a school. In those cases, the days would not count toward student attendance and would need to be made up, just like a snow day or a water main break day. There may be circumstances that are extenuating enough to consider "learning at home" as an option for a small group of students for a short period of time. Please know that the continued safety of our students and staff is our top priority, we take none of this lightly, and we are analyzing each situation in an ever-changing environment. For now, please have a contingency plan in place should you receive an early morning notice that school is closed due to reasons related to COVID-19, just like you have a contingency plan in place for inclement weather.

Please also be aware that the COVID guidance at the national and state levels is changing quickly. With very short notice we may need to change our practices accordingly. We are doing our very best to keep up with and communicate the changes.

On Wednesday, January 12 our school board is holding a community budget forum. All are warmly invited. Details, including the Zoom invitation, can be found on the district website, www.wcsu32.org.

I'd be remiss if I didn't acknowledge that today, January 6, is the one-year anniversary of the events at the U.S. Capitol, an event that is fraught with challenge and conflict. Rather than focusing on the divisiveness of that day, in this letter I choose to reflect on January 6, 2021 through the lens of Amanda Gorman's poem *New Day's Lyric*. You can enjoy her recitation [here](#).

I sincerely hope that in the weeks to come I can devote more space in the community letter to all of the great things that are happening in our school district. Let's all do our part to take care of each other both physically and emotionally as we ride this Omicron wave. And, as always, please reach out if you have any questions or concerns.

Warmly,
Jen Miller-Arsenault
Interim Superintendent