

February 17, 2022

Dear Washington Central Community,

This week we've had 13 cases of COVID-19 across our schools: 5 at Berlin, 2 at Doty, 2 at East Montpelier, and 4 at U-32.

Yesterday you received a lot of information from Maria Melekos, our COVID 19 Coordinator, regarding [masking](#) and [post-break testing](#). If you haven't yet had the opportunity to read her letters, I encourage you to do so at your earliest convenience. Below are a few timely highlights.

Masking: We have historically seen an increase in COVID cases after a school break. In order to safely return to school and get past the period when folks may have traveled or socialized in different ways than they do when school is in session, we will continue to require masking in all of our schools through March 9. Our plan is to gradually transition to a mask optional practice in our schools that have achieved a vaccination rate of 80% or higher of the eligible population. As of right now, only U-32 has achieved that rate. We know that optional masking will be a welcome move to some, and it will be a source of anxiety for others. We know that some of our community members are medically vulnerable and that many folks will continue to choose to wear masks. As we enter this next phase of the pandemic, it is vital that we keep kindness, generosity of spirit, and respect at the forefront of our interactions.

Post-Break Testing: The State is providing one test kit to all students and staff members to take home during the break. Each kit contains two rapid antigen tests. Students and staff members are encouraged to take tests on Monday, February 28 and Tuesday, March 1. We can distribute test kits to students only with prior parental/caregiver consent. Please see Maria's letter for more information.

February is Black History Month, a time to honor, learn more about, and celebrate the achievements of African Americans and their central role in our history. Students across the district have been learning about the struggles and joys of Black History. And, in alignment with the vision statement and work of our WCUUSD Humanity and Justice Coalition, my hope is that we fully develop, implement, and monitor a culturally responsive and inclusive curriculum Pre-K through Graduation. We have started this work, we have plenty of work to do, and I anticipate that we will constantly examine, refine, and improve our practices in service to our students, which is exactly what we should do.

This morning the road conditions changed very quickly. The bus company worked with our towns to ensure that all buses arrived at school safely. The weather forecast looks iffy for tomorrow. So much for sailing smoothly into February break! Hopefully the timing of any precipitation will not interfere with our arrival. I'll connect with the bus company (who connects directly with our road crews), Roger Hill, and our team here to make the safest decision possible given the information we have at the time.

I am often reminded that pausing is fundamentally important for learning and reflecting and recharging. May we all find some moments to pause as we consolidate everything we've learned and experienced together so far this year and fortify ourselves for the learning and growing that we will do together this spring.

To that end, please know that our hardworking staff, including Maria, our principals, and I, need and are looking forward to some time to rest and recharge as well. As always, please reach out if you have any questions or concerns. I can be reached at jmillerarsenault@u32.org or (802) 229-0553 and, after tomorrow, will be available again starting on Monday, February 28. Have a wonderful break!

Warmly,
Jen Miller-Arsenault
Interim Superintendent