



North Stonington Public Schools

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January 8, 2021

Dear North Stonington Public Schools families,

Happy New Year and above all let's have a safe one! I am excited with the fact that the state has begun to vaccinate for the COVID-19 virus through the Vaccine Administration Management System (VAMS). I had the experience the other day to visit the doctor and was told by the Physician's Assistant who was treating me that she as well as everyone at South County Hospital already had their first of two COVID-19 vaccinations. Mrs. Robbie McCarthy, Administrative Assistant, and Jessica Kessler, School Nurse at Wheeler, will be uploading information in VAMS so that district employees, on a priority basis, can begin getting vaccinated. We are all hopeful for a far-better spring and summer than we had last year.

As always, we will continue to review the town's COVID data as we make educational decisions. Please note that the Board of Education will keep posting on its agenda the "Reopening Plan" and has asked the administration to continue to look for options.

I want everyone one to know that I will always do my best to be as transparent as possible, especially related to COVID. Where transparency comes into conflict is when I may be breaching confidentiality for either students or staff. We are a very small district and it may be easy to discern someone who has been confirmed to have COVID. COVID, like any other illness, comes under the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 (HIPAA). "It is a federal law that required the creation of national standards to protect sensitive patient health information from being disclosed without the patient's consent or knowledge." That includes all individuals-students and staff.

Additionally, the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) (20 U.S.C. § 1232g; 34 CFR Part 99), is a Federal law that protects the privacy of student education records. Not all students have IEPs solely the result of a "learning disability." There are some students that have acute illnesses that impede their educational growth and are considered for special education services. They receive those services as a disability under the condition of Other Health Impaired (OHI). Coming from a district of nearly 11,000 students it is sometimes challenging for me here in North Stonington. While I want to be as transparent as possible, above all, I do not want to violate confidentiality. We have been fortunate that we have not had an extraordinary amount of COVID cases. What might be the best way for me to report the COVID case numbers is to do it on a monthly or on a biweekly base, as it may be more difficult to identify those infected.

As a reminder, if you traveled during the winter break, please refer to previous guidance from the CDC and the Ledge Light Health District. I recently returned from a vacation and got tested in Groton the morning after my return. I received my test results in a couple of days. The guidance works.

Finally, you may have heard that the state has given districts and municipalities the option of reducing the number of days for close contact quarantining. Our health professionals and administrators recently took part in a webinar which delineated the requirements to reduce the quarantine. LLHD has issued an advisory. LLHD, our health professionals as well as our administrators, feel for the safety of our students and staff, staying with the 14-day quarantine period is the safest way to handle the virus as we move closer to being vaccinated.

As always, on behalf of the administrators and Board of Education, we'd like to thank everyone for your patience as we look forward to returning to a full-return and most importantly, resuming our normal lives. We also wish everyone a wonderful holiday and a happy and, above all, safe New Year!

Stay safe.

Peter L. Nero
Superintendent of Schools