



Press Release
December 3, 2021

Update from San Juan Island School District Superintendent

Can you believe it? Winter break is almost upon us. Wasn't it just yesterday that we opened our school doors to full day, in-person instruction? Even though this fall has flown by, last week's Thanksgiving celebration reminded me we have much to be grateful for in our public schools.

Hopefully you have noticed the rebuilding of the tennis courts. Weather has kept us from final completion, but we are looking forward to using this facility by early spring. In addition to the tennis courts, we have begun work on the following:

1. Re-roofing Stuart Island School.
2. Developing plans for the new art room in the STEM building.
3. Initiating design development for the high school science and culinary rooms.

We want you to know that we are making progress on our Capital Projects list, and we are sincerely thankful for the community support of our Capital levy two years ago.

We have much to celebrate. On campus, the students bring a spark of energy to the buildings that resembles pre-pandemic days. Through COVID-19 mitigation protocols, our sports teams are allowed to safely compete. Music and theater students will soon be performing. These kids are certainly inspiring in their ability to adapt and keep moving!

By state order everyone that enters the building must wear a mask. Outside, masks are not mandated, but social distancing is expected. At school we work hard to ensure that safety protocols are implemented with fidelity. Even so, COVID-19 has reached into the schools. As a result, some students have found themselves in quarantine. With each positive case, our response has been quick and decisive. Any potential spread was mitigated, and classes continued.

So, what are these mitigating steps?

1. The district does contact tracing when a case is identified. Because seating charts are mandated, we can quickly identify which students would be considered close contact (within three feet for over fifteen minutes) and they

are then quarantined for ten days. Vaccinated students are not mandated to quarantine.

2. Those students within three to six feet can enter the “test to stay” program. In this program, students are tested every two days for two weeks with a rapid antigen test. If negative, they are allowed to come to school, but are, in effect, under quarantine for the time outside their school day. This has worked well to keep students in their classes.
3. We continue to offer free testing to staff and students on Wednesday afternoons and at other times if requested.
4. We provide more thorough PCR tests to quarantined students on day 8 or 9 of their quarantine so they can return by day 11.

At this point in time, our processes are working and the number of students who miss school has been limited. We will remain diligent in enforcing our safety measures. Children need face to face instruction, so we strictly follow the guidance of the health department, keeping pace with new information. We live in world where COVID is real, but we must move forward, maintain safe behaviors, and give students opportunities to learn and grow.

As your superintendent, I listen very carefully to opinions concerning masks, mandates, and vaccinations. As Americans, we have the right to voice our opinion. Civil discourse is the bedrock of our democracy. As a school district we remained dedicated to consistently following the guidelines established by Governor’s office, the State Department of Health, and the county health and community services. Our objective is keeping students in the classroom.

It is hard to say what the new year will bring. As a society we seem to be re-learning how to live and work even with the threat of a new variant. However, change seems to be the way of life. What I can promise you is that we are going to continue to work hard to keep schools a safe place for children.

Speaking of hard work, I want to offer a huge thank you to our dedicated teachers and staff. From the bus drivers to kitchen staff, to office personnel, to our custodians and of course, to those in the classroom, all have been working hard on behalf of student success and wellbeing. We have had to adapt, be flexible, and in some cases, learn how to communicate differently. Through it all, our staff has remained committed to excellence.

As we move into the final week before the schools’ winter break, I would like to take a moment to express my gratitude for your on-going support. I wish you and your family a wonderful holiday season and a safe and restful winter break.