

MT. BLUE REGIONAL SCHOOL DISTRICT

CHESTERVILLE – FARMINGTON – INDUSTRY – NEW SHARON – NEW VINEYARD – STARKS – TEMPLE – VIENNA – WELD – WILTON
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“Public Schools not only serve the public, they make the public.”

TO: RSU 9 Parents and Staff
FROM: Christian M. Elkington, Superintendent
RE: Next steps in RSU 9?
DATE: 2-18-2022

In the eight months that I have been your Superintendent, we have certainly seen and had some trying times. Throughout this time, I have been impressed with the respect and dignity used by most when differences of opinion have been shared or about decisions made by our School Board or me which have not had unanimous support. I also continue to be highly impressed with the follow-through and respect given by our students in following RSU 9 expectations that are not well received in some parts of our communities. This is especially true with our older students who can push the envelope at this time in their development. Respectful disagreement is supposed to be a cornerstone of the United States and I am thankful that in my experience it is still being practiced in RSU 9.

We are now coming to a critical point in the Pandemic where further adjustments for COVID protocols in our schools will be recommended by the ME CDC and DOE in the coming three weeks. Multiple signs (present strain of COVID, increased vaccination rates, reduced infection rates) are showing that the future looks very hopeful for improvement to overall public health in Maine. As many of you may have read, possible next steps have been outlined by ME CDC Director, Dr. Shah, as follows:

1. Masking requirements in schools will remain in place for at least a week following the end of our February break in case infection rates increase while students are away from school.
2. ME CDC is expanding access and encouraging all families to take advantage of the free test kits (information was shared with you yesterday) that are available to Maine families. Testing before returning to school after the vacation is recommended.
3. Masking will remain a requirement in the Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for any positive cases of COVID-19 returning to school/work in the 5–10-day window after confirmed diagnosis or symptom onset.
4. ME CDC is carefully monitoring the US CDC’s statements on making changes to masking recommendations for school settings. If the US CDC does not issue more restrictive guidelines in the next weeks, and if reported positive cases of COVID case counts in Maine continue to go down, the ME CDC will begin Maine specific conversations that could establish plans for moving toward a masking-optional recommendation for schools.
5. The federal transportation requirement for masks is currently in effect until March 18, including for school buses. Any changes to this timeline would have to come from the US CDC.
6. At this time, with reductions in cases and positivity rates, pooled testing continues its value, and the program will continue.

As the new guidelines are discussed and debated, it is **vital that we continue to model for our students and young people the same respect and dignity** that has been the cornerstone of public discussions in my time in RSU 9. There is never a time for personal attacks and vitriol, and it is especially true today where, throughout our country, too many people are trying to split us apart instead of trying to help find a way for us to work better together for the good of our students and the communities of RSU 9 (CHESTERVILLE, FARMINGTON, INDUSTRY, NEW SHARON, NEW VINEYARD, STARKS, TEMPLE, VIENNA, WELD, and WILTON).

Over the next few weeks, in RSU 9, we will be following all updated guidelines and guidance from the ME CDC and ME DOE. It is our hope that any possible changes will be ready for our next School Board Mtg. on March 8th, where we are scheduled to discuss changes or adjustments to COVID protocols based on my recommendations. As has been my practice, I will share any suggested changes to our COVID protocols, including masking, with you before the meeting.

Until the RSU 9, March 8th Board Mtg. we will:

- Continue not to require that students test to return to school, but we strongly encourage families to do this so as not to put RSU 9 students or staff at increased risk.
- Continue with our Pooled Testing program which has approximately 36% of our students and staff involved.
- Continue with our masking expectations for students, staff, and visitors in all RSU 9 facilities.
- Maintain the requirement of masks on all school transportation until at least this federal requirement is lifted and our School Board determines next steps.

Thanks for taking the time to read this memo and for your continued support of our students and staff along with respectful disagreement in RSU 9!