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August 13, 2021

Summary:

- **First Student Day of School is August 31, 2021**
- **Reopening 2.0 plan was updated to address “Substantial” level of COVID transmission**
- **Use of public transportation requires masks per Federal requirement**
- **Individual Schools will host virtual gatherings to review schedules and protocols**

Dear Kearsarge Community,

Welcome back for the start of the 2021-2022 school year. We are excited to see the return of staff and students to our facilities, and look forward to Tuesday, August 31st, the first day of school for our returning students.

When school closed for the 2020-2021 school year, the District communicated with our community the need to assess and adjust the Reopening Plan 2.0 presented in June in accordance with prevailing medical guidance. As was the norm during the 2020-21 school year, the District’s Critical Decision Unit (CDU) has monitored and followed the guidance issued by the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), the Center for Disease Control (CDC), and the New Hampshire Department of Education (DOE) to address concerns relating to COVID-19. As we are a public school system, the need to remain aligned with New Hampshire and Federal agencies continues to be a driving force in making and implementing decisions related to the wellbeing and safety of the school community.

At the August 12, 2021 meeting of the Kearsarge School Board, the CDU provided recommendations to the School Board to adjust the Reopening Plan 2.0 in accordance with updated DHHS and CDC data reflecting a level of “Substantial” community spread of COVID-19 in Merrimack County. This level indicates the highest level of transmission of COVID-19 on the CDC and DHHS scale of reporting. The Board subsequently adopted the changes in support of the CDU’s recommendations. Specific changes to the Reopening Plan 2.0 will address masking requirements for students and staff inside our facilities as well as continuing need to monitor, assess, and adjust them in accordance with community spread, facility impact, and individual school building issues of substantial concern.

The changes to Reopening 2.0 will be updated accordingly and published on the District and School’s websites, as well as be sent to the community via email communications as soon as practicable. All changes to Reopening Plan 2.0 will remain in effect until altered by the School Board. Specifically, these changes are:

1. *All students and staff (with the exception of PK-1 students which remain recommended for students, but required for staff), regardless of vaccination status, will be required to wear masks indoors at all times. Masks are not required for anyone when outside or in designated mask break locations and times.*

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2. *Student and staff masks may be removed during designated mask breaks, when participating in outdoor activities, when engaged in specific and limited special education related service provision that requires the removal of masks to provide or receive the service, and when eating.*

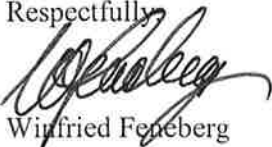
Additionally, on January 29, 2021, the CDC issued an Order that required face masks to be worn by all people while on public transportation (which included all passengers on Public School buses) traveling into, within, or out of the United States and U.S. territories. As this order has not been removed, we will continue to require masks for all students and staff using the buses for transportation to and from school, as well as for any co-curricular activities or field trips.

As the fall athletic season opens, the use of masks will not be required when the practices and competitions occur outdoors. Athletes participating in indoor activities / sports will be required to wear masks during practices and when not competing (e.g. when on the bench). Similar restrictions will also be required of students engaging in courses that may require strenuous breathing, such as Physical Education, Chorus, and Band and may be adjusted as appropriate (e.g. mask wearing, additional social distance spacing, spit coverings on instruments, etc.) due to the activity students are engaging in.

Building principals will be scheduling virtual gatherings for schools to help the community to understand the adjustments to schedules, curriculum, and resources in the days before school. They will also assist parents and students in identifying needs as we continue to address the impact of COVID-19. Please look to each building's administration and their respective communications for specific details regarding the time and date of these gatherings.

In closing, the School Board's adoption of escalating restrictions to Reopening Plan 2.0 reflect the current conditions impacting our region. DHHS, CDC, and community leaders have all made clear and definitive calls for those eligible to receive vaccinations to obtain them, as vaccinations have a demonstrable impact on the reduced transmission of COVID-19 virus, including the known variants now ravaging communities with low vaccination rates. As vaccinations currently are not available for two thirds of our building's students, they remain at substantial risk of infection. We ask for your continuing support in helping us to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 in our students while we open the doors for the year with as much "return to normalcy" as safely practicable

Respectfully,



Winfried Feneberg
Superintendent



Michael Bessette
Assistant Superintendent