



Dear Families,

It seems impossible that we are already into December! It has been a strong first semester of the school year, thus far, despite the challenges that COVID-19 continues to have on all of our lives. Our students are engaged and thriving, and our teachers and staff continue to bring their very best to their roles each day.

The past few weeks we have seen a few spikes in the COVID numbers at our schools, with numbers climbing into the double digits and even reaching 60 students one week at one school. While the numbers are down significantly from that this week, we do not know whether they will peak again and whether the Omnicron variant will have any impact on our school community in the coming weeks and months. That said, I am encouraged that our numbers are currently down.

Last night, at the December 2 School Board Meeting, the School Board discussed the Safe Learning Plan, as it has committed to do at each School Board Meeting this school year. We heard a presentation from our Health Services Director, Annie Lumbar Bendson, which, in addition to providing the current COVID case counts and comparison of those to other districts, also provided the Board with information on the vaccination rates we are seeing in our schools. Ms. Lumbar Bendson shared that 75.8% of our high school students are fully vaccinated. At MME, 57.4% of students are fully vaccinated (now that all students are eligible), and once other students receive their second dose, 72.3% will be fully vaccinated. At MMW, 52.9% are fully vaccinated (now that all students are eligible), and once other students receive their second dose, 65.8% will be fully vaccinated. The Board and I discussed how the middle school vaccination rates are nearing where the high school vaccination rate was when the Board chose to make masks 'strongly recommended' and not mandated at the high school.

After a long discussion, the Board determined last night that at the January School Board

Meeting, it will decide whether to bring a motion to remove the mask mandate at the middle schools and to make masks ‘strongly recommended’ there, instead, as they have with the high school. Currently, at the elementary schools, 4.3% of students are fully vaccinated, and once they receive their second dose, 53.5% will be fully vaccinated. The Board discussed whether they might also consider lifting the mask mandate for elementary schools in January and decided the vaccination numbers were not yet high enough to say they are considering that for now, but that things could change by January, so they did not rule it out.

We have much to learn between now and January. We do not know what the Omnicron variant will bring. We do not know if our COVID numbers will spike after winter break. And, we do not know whether the ‘fully vaccinated’ rates will rise to where we expect them to rise. However, I do feel that our situation is encouraging, and I appreciate how seriously our families and staff have taken safety precautions throughout the pandemic, which helps us keep kids in school. This is an incredibly engaged and supportive community, and it continues to be my great honor to lead the district.

I wish you a wonderful, restful and joyous holiday season and winter break. Stay safe and enjoy the time together with your families and friends.

Respectfully,

Dennis L. Peterson
Superintendent of Schools