

Jan. 20, 2021

A Message from the COVID Safety Team

Dear staff,

As part of our ongoing work to keep you informed about COVID safety practices and protocols we will be sharing regular updates. Each update will include the latest information from local and regional agencies as well as stories and resources within our district.

ICYMI (in case you missed it): The [Whatcom County Health Department made a video with our BPS COVID safety coordinator Jenny Lawrence](#). **The video covers topics including:** why are we reopening when cases are rising? How is data collected? What do we know locally about the COVID mutations? How are vaccines going to be distributed in our community?

You'll notice that the video is divided into chapters by topic.



COVID-19 Safety Check-in from School Nurse, Matt Neisinger



Students in kindergarten, first grade, BRIDGES and Life Skills have been attending in-person learning for close to two months and second grade returned to school Jan. 14. As we prepare to bring back more students, we would like to share some of the success that we have seen and some helpful resources for staff who may be returning to in-person instruction.

As a primer, staff should know that the COVID mitigation strategies that the district employs are primarily derived from guidance provided by the Washington State Department of Health (DOH), Whatcom County Health Department (WCHD), and OSPI.

Additional guidance can be found through the CDC.

All four agencies (DOH, OSPI, WCHD, CDC) recommend layering mitigation strategies as the most effective approach to limiting the spread of COVID-19. Examples of mitigation strategies employed by our schools include masking, increased cleaning, cohorting, distancing, contact tracing, limiting (but not eliminating) shared objects, increasing ventilation, changing water and food delivery systems, symptom screening, and limiting visitors.

So how are we doing? As of today, we have had eight known COVID cases in our schools that resulted in exposure to students and/or staff. In some of these cases the affected person was asymptomatic and attended several days of school while infectious before testing positive. On the surface this may sound scary, but these cases help show our mitigation strategies are being effectively deployed.

According to the health department, none of the eight COVID cases resulted in spread to other students or staff. The COVID safety team is so thankful for all the staff that have been employing these mitigation strategies while continuing to meet the social-emotional and academic needs of our students.

As more staff prepare to return to our buildings, we encourage you to spend some time refreshing yourselves on our different mitigation strategies and how we are implementing them. A good place to start is by visiting the Bellingham Public Schools [HR COVID-19 Information page](#). There are videos, presentations, a FAQ, and documents to get you started. Another good place to look is the [COVID-19 handbook](#). Your school's COVID-19 safety team is a building specific resource to help answer your questions; your administrator can help direct you to your team members.

We are so grateful for the immense effort each of you are giving in service to our students.

Whatcom County data and updates

[Whatcom County Health Department Data Dashboard](#)

[Whatcom County COVID-19 testing information](#)

[FAQ re: vaccines from the Whatcom County Health Department](#)

Bellingham Public Schools links

- Message from Dr. Baker Jan. 14: [Focus on youngest learners, COVID cases rising in Whatcom County](#)
- [Bellingham Public Schools COVID dashboard](#)
- [Important resources and information for staff returning to our schools](#) and past COVID newsletters for staff