

Comox Valley Schools
School District No. 71
Office of the Superintendent of Schools

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Dear Parents / Caregivers,

Comox Valley Schools would like to extend a huge thank you for your support during the previous week. We acknowledge that our current state is extremely challenging for our families, staff, and students. Please know we are committed to providing the safest environment for our students and staff as we navigate through these difficult and uncertain times. We would like to share some information regarding the change in protocols following the direction school districts received from the Provincial Health Officer and the Ministry of Education last week.

Public Health informed school districts that the emergence of the more transmissible Omicron variant of COVID-19 has necessitated changes in public health management. With higher levels of community transmission, a shorter virus incubation period, and the increased use of rapid antigen testing, contact tracing and close contact notification by public health is no longer effective to minimize the spread of COVID-19. Effective immediately, schools will not be sending out exposure notifications. Public Health will notify those individuals who have tested positive for COVID-19. Schools will not be receiving any information regarding individual exposure events from Island Health.

While those who test positive do not need to notify the school or others at school, individuals should still contact their school to report absences. When informing your child's school of an absence, please understand that any question relating to the nature of your child's absence is simply to help identify COVID-19 related illness, so we don't mistakenly associate every absence with COVID-19. It is not about being nosy, but rather about being precise with our data. If we need to close a school for health reasons, we want to make sure it is an informed decision based on actual COVID-19 related illness.

To protect personal privacy, schools cannot release individual contact information for the purpose of an individual (staff, student, or parent/caregiver) seeking to notifying others of their test result. As well schools will not send notification to others on behalf of individuals, or parents/caregivers even if they have given consent to share this information. We respectfully request that parents not contact teachers or school principals requesting class lists or phone numbers as they will not be able to provide this information. We thank you in advance.

Practically, then, a school's awareness of COVID-19 will be generally measured through student attendance rather than knowledge of individual cases. Using attendance data, specifically those coded as absent due to illness, schools and public health will collaborate to monitor student attendance and will work together to investigate higher than normal rates of student absence. In the event a school's illness absence data is 10% higher at average over historical data, a letter will be sent home indicating that an Activity Signal (related to attendance) has been met and as such further work with Island Health will begin to determine next steps, up to and including a closure due to health reasons.

The new protocol also outlines the types of school closures that may occur.

Health Closure

A Health Closure may be determined for a school by the local health authority due to unusually high student absence rates.

Functional Closure

A Functional Closure of a school is determined by the school district due to a lack of staff to provide the required level of teaching, supervision, support, and or custodial care to ensure the health and safety of students. This would likely be due to high absenteeism of staff or certain employees required for a school to function and the inability to replace those absences.

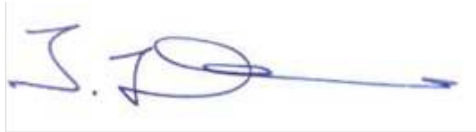
Transportation Closure

This type of closure would occur if the bus provider indicated that due to high absenteeism, they are not able to replace drivers. Schools would remain open and operational however those that normally take the bus would need to find their own way to and from school.

A detailed graphic explaining these closures is attached for your information.

It is probably an over-used statement, but we continue to find ourselves in unfamiliar, uncharted territory and we continue to adapt to our ever-changing circumstances. We remain committed to in-person learning and sincerely hope we do not need to functionally close a school. We also know students will be absent due to COVID-19 and will work to continue to support these students during these absences.

Thank you once again for your support,
Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'T. Demeo', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Tom Demeo
Superintendent/CEO
Comox Valley Schools