

Questions for the COVID-related Q&A on January 13th, 2022

1. Is it possible to get online options, like last year, for people who can make it, who are at home sick for weeks due to families being infected, are immunocompromised or who cannot confidently attend in-person classes?

We do not offer full online learning programs for kindergarten to grade 8 students, as some larger districts are able to. We are committed to supporting continuity of learning for our students, though.

For those who are absent while either sick or for self-isolation periods, staff will provide some independent learning activities to support students' continued learning needs while they are away. And, should we face the possible urgent situation where we need to close an entire school or a class, due to extreme staffing shortages or by direction of the health authority, our staff will shift to a temporary combination of online and home learning work until we can have everyone safely return to their classroom.

2. Given that omicron is airborne and spreading much easier and faster will the district now allow Hepa and UV filters into the classrooms?

No. The quality of ventilation, complexities of air flow, and the guidance and recommendations from provincial health and safety authorities that we have been tasked to act on have not changed since the beginning of the year. As it stands, we are meeting or exceeding recommended standards on ventilation wherever possible, and continue to do regular maintenance and scheduled filter changes as we run at full capacity and maximize the systems at each school

We have shared system overviews on the District website for anyone who wants to better understand the ventilation at each site: <https://newwestschools.ca/ventilation-systems-documentation-for-each-school/>

3. Given the information regarding how quick Omicron is being transmitted, shouldn't all people in the schools be wearing N95 masks at all times?

The Provincial Health Officer has recommended 3-layer masks, and as such, our District has made sure that every school is equipped with disposable 3-layer masks to support any staff or students who forget theirs or might need a replacement. Individuals who would like to wear something other than that are welcome to make their own personal choices, as part of continuing to follow the masking rules in place.

4. Will students move to eating outdoors given how fast Omicron is spreading / transmitted?

There are no recommendations or plans to mandate children eat outside, particularly at this colder time of year. Our staff support and encourage kids to get outside as needed and appropriate, for a wide range of reasons. As the current cold snap recedes and we look toward better weather ahead, we will likely see more teachers considering where there are opportunities for additional outside play and learning, as they have through much of the pandemic.

5. What is the District doing to ensure schools are supporting the mental health of our children?

Schools continue to prioritize mental health, and it is an essential component of the Physical and Health Education curriculum at all grade levels. Schools are also using a variety of Social and Emotional Learning programs and teaching explicit lessons to students on emotions, feelings, self-regulation, relationships, behaviour, healthy living, understanding the brain, and managing stress and life challenges. Some of these programs include Zones of Regulation, RULER, Second Step, EASE and Third Path. Our Child and Youth Care Workers are offering wellness groups to students and supporting students individually as needed. School Counsellors are providing sessions for students who are struggling with anxiety and other mental health concerns on a regular basis. We are also offering student wellness sessions on a variety of topics (generated by the students themselves) through our new Wellness Centre at NWSS. If parents/caregivers are concerned about their child's mental health, they should contact their school counsellor.

6. How are you ensuring students have a comfortable learning environment where they can focus and be their best selves?"

Our learning environments are based on strong positive relationships between teachers and students. Our teachers know their students well and work proactively with them to teach them about respecting others, appropriate behaviour, how to work as a group, and about the safety measures we need to take for COVID19. They do this with understanding and compassion. Teachers may be rearranging the classroom space to create further distancing so that students feel comfortable and safe or changing some of their classroom routines (e.g., how and where to line up safely). If your child is not feeling comfortable in their learning environment, please contact your teacher to determine any additional supports that can be put in place.

7. Details on the ventilation in portables is very limited and does not include exact dates or even years. This lack of information does not develop trust. More transparency is needed, and more protection is needed for students in all portables. Could the District explain at the meeting and follow this up with more details and photos of how the ventilation systems in each portable works and how it meets requirements.

Portables are heated and vented by furnaces, and their ventilation system is not attached to the main school.

Portable furnaces take in mixed air (natural/fresh air AND circulated air/air from inside the portable) and it goes through a filter, it is heated through the air exchanger and the blower motor is engaged, and circulates the mixed air through the floor registers/grills. For natural/fresh air, a 4" vent (minimum) with a fresh air damper, is installed on the exterior of the wall beside the

furnace. As far as natural fresh air ventilation goes, we also encourage staff to open windows for even more natural ventilation in all of the classrooms.

Upon installation of our portables, Technical Safety BC comes to site and does the inspection, to ensure that the units are installed properly, and our facilities team regularly checks to ensure they are operating properly.

We have replaced the furnace filter with Merv 13 filters (the recommended filtration cited by the Ministry of Education) which will catch smaller microns than what was originally in the portable of Merv 8. So all air (recirculated and fresh air) goes through the Merv 13 filter.

The filters for all portables, as well as main school buildings, were all completed in and around Winter break with the next change coming during Spring Break. The change of filters is 4 x per year.

At this time, the District is continually looking for opportunities for improving ventilation in portables and will continue to follow the Ministry of Education's lead on best practices.

8. We are told to assume we have COVID if we are sick. Once we have no symptoms, we can return to school. However, we could end up sick again and again, never knowing if we have COVID or not due to the lack of testing available. Potentially, our children could be in this revolving door - missing a lot of school. What does the school district plan to do in these situations? Are Rapid tests available for these situations?

Like parents, we are also awaiting news about what community access to rapid testing options will look like. As it pertains to reducing the spread, it is vital that families and staff work together to follow the recommendations and processes in place, which include staying home when sick or adhering to self-isolation guidelines. We are actively monitoring for possible spikes in above average absentee rates, and we have plans in place to support both students and staff through this, including our plans around supporting the continuity of learning.