

ESSEX COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS



Office of the Superintendent

Essex County Public Schools
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December 3, 2020

Dear Essex Schools' Family:

I write to you all with an update concerning the ongoing status of the school division. Within my travels through our schools, I am so very proud to see the attention to detail by that of our staff with the support and care of our children, the delivery of quality instruction, and the service to our students in the spirit of excellence. I am also truly thankful of the tremendous contributions of our cafeteria staff, administrative support staff, paras, administrators and our bus drivers; we could not operate effectively without such valiant members of school division.

I am quite aware of the recent cause of concern resulting from the increases in COVID rates across the nation and locally. Daily, I check the Virginia Department of Health metrics. On Tuesday (12/2), the 14-day cases per 100k was 280.8, while the percentage positive tests per 14 days was 6.5. Both indicators are trending upward from earlier in November. However, the seven-day moving average of case incidence was 31.4, which is right where it was just prior to Thanksgiving break. Also on Tuesday, I spoke with Dr. Williams with the Three Rivers Health District and he affirmed our continued implementation of in-person instruction. Dr. Williams further indicated that Essex Schools have not encountered positive COVID cases with the students or staff in our buildings, nor have we experienced any outbreaks, since the onset of in-person instruction (outbreak being defined as a viral transmission within the school setting with at least two or more persons). This week, Dr. Lane, state superintendent, indicated that that he continues to support in-person instruction, notwithstanding the current metrics, so long as there is no school-wide spread. Twelve COVID cases were reported in the Essex community (not in the schools) as of Monday; we are monitoring this uptick in cases to determine if it is a change in trend. Please know that we stand ready to quickly shift to virtual instruction, if it appears that students or staff are in jeopardy. Weekly, since the start of in-person instruction, I am notified of "potential cases," in which someone was exposed to another individual (outside the school division) with COVID. In such cases, staff members are directed to quarantine until such time that we are certain that said individuals are virus free. In the event that we receive information on a confirmed case, I will notify the school division community and take appropriate action.

Keeping the students and staff safe is my foremost concern. I will endeavor to ensure that this school division has what it needs to ensure the safety and security of all. I would like to thank our parents for the faith you have extended to us to educate your children amid this pandemic.

Best,

Dr. Harry R. Thomas III
Division Superintendent, Essex County Public Schools