

Nov. 1, 2021

Dear ASD Families,

Happy November! As we pave our way through the second quarter, I have new information about ASD's actions in regard to the ongoing pandemic.

Anticipated Pfizer eligibility for children ages five and up

ASD anticipates children as young as five will be eligible for vaccination against COVID-19 within the coming days. That opens up eligibility to an estimated 21,000 students at ASD. The District is preparing large-scale vaccination clinics to support families who **choose to** vaccinate. Again, I highlight **the choice with parental consent**. The indoor clinics will be held at the Education Center, located at the intersection of Boniface and East Northern Lights, and there will be several Saturday clinics at high school sites. We've scheduled the clinics intentionally during evening and weekend hours to accommodate family schedules. The clinics will be walk-in only, however we ask families to complete the [COVID-19 Vaccine Consent Form](#) for their child in the Beacon system ahead of time if possible. Please see details [here](#) for dates, times, and locations.

Making the vaccine available to this new group of students will add to our already layered COVID-19 mitigation plan. Our end goal is to keep healthy students and staff in school; we are excited to add this additional tool to our box to focus on learning during the pandemic.

Same-day COVID-19 testing expands to all schools through new partnership with Beechtree Diagnostics

I am happy to share that after a successful pilot program with a local lab, COVID-19 testing for symptomatic students and staff will expand into all ASD schools this week. The District piloted the program with Beechtree Diagnostics during September and October in our "big 8" high schools, and we have slowly expanded the program. This week, every school that has a nurse will have the equipment to test students. This action was taken as too many students and staff had to be out of school long periods while awaiting test results. This is how it works:

- School nurses take a nasal or saliva swab that is sent by a courier at the end of the school day to Beechtree Diagnostics.
- This RT-PCR testing is only done **with parental consent**; the parent/guardian registers with Beechtree, then chooses how they would like to receive test results, either by text or email.
- The school nurse will also be alerted; test results are typically available that evening, allowing families to better understand if their student should attend the next school day.
- This option for testing will be available to symptomatic and exposed (aka close contact) staff and students.

If you have questions on what to do if your student is feeling unwell, or when a student who has been sick can return to school, please refer to our latest [Health Screening Guidelines](#) for families.

Update to Suspended Bus Routes

While we make great strides in vaccination availability and testing, we are progressing slower with increasing our workforce, specifically in our transportation department. While our efforts to hire additional staff look promising, we are preparing two additional cohorts of suspended bus routes in the event staffing shortages continue. My hope is to give you as much advance notice as possible. I acknowledge that these changes to your daily routine are stressful.

When the District initially announced suspended bus routes in August, we planned four cohorts that would each experience a three-week suspension of service. If needed, [a fifth and sixth cohort](#) will be implemented, with Cohort 5 suspended Nov. 22 through Dec. 10 and Cohort 6 suspended Dec. 13 through January 7. This advance notice is intended to allow time for families to plan and prepare for this temporary suspension.

However, there is light at the end of the tunnel! ASD continues an aggressive recruitment campaign that includes hiring bonuses for new staff and referral bonuses for current employees. When we first initiated the suspended routes there were roughly 50 vacant bus driver positions. We have since made progress in our hiring. Three new hires just completed their training, and six additional folks are training diligently. Our goal is to absorb the suspended routes and not have to implement cohorts five or six. If anything changes we will communicate to the families affected in those cohorts.

While I will continue to send these twice monthly updates, I'd like to also direct you to our [Hot Topics](#) page, where timely information is posted as events unfold.

As we enter into the season of thankfulness, I would like to thank the ASD parents, grandparents, aunties and uncles, and all adults who support our students – thank you for your partnership and flexibility. As your students reach new milestones in their learning, you as their support system deserve just as much recognition for that good grade, star on the completed work, or spot on the honor roll. We know the best place for kids to be is in their regular school environment where they learn and grow; together we have turned against the tide to keep healthy kids and staff in school.

Cheers,

Deena Bishop, Ed.D.
Superintendent