

GRAND ISLE SUPERVISORY UNION

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2 March 2022

Dear Parents, Guardians & Community members,

Happy March! I hope everyone had a fantastic February break. I'd like to thank everyone in the 5 Grand Isle County towns who voted in yesterday's elections. The school budget passed in Champlain Island Unified Union and South Hero School Districts and was defeated in the Alburgh School District. Each of the boards will talk about the budget process at their next meetings and as always we welcome community participation.

You'll recall that before we left for break I wrote about a shift in the VT AOE masking guidelines for schools in the [February 16, 2022 Community Letter](#). The guidance change was tied to student vaccination rates in each school and the state had indicated that it would publish each school's vaccination rate before February 28, 2022. Unfortunately, this publication has not happened and effectively has the GISU schools in a holding pattern. Frankly, we anticipate that our official student vaccination rate is below the 80% threshold in all of our schools - except maybe Folsom where we think we are right around the 80% mark. If a masking change is tied to a student vaccination rate the state publication will be critical.

In the meantime, the CDC has developed new masking guidelines for schools based on community factors. GISU has followed the VT AOE and VDH guidance since the start of the pandemic - and will continue to do so. On Monday, February 28, 2022 superintendents received the following information from Secretary French:

“On Friday, Feb. 25, 2022, the CDC updated their COVID-19 [guidance on wearing masks indoors](#) as well as [on school buses](#). Vermont is currently evaluating that guidance. Schools should continue to follow the [recommendations from the Agency of Education and Vermont Department of Health](#) to guide their decision making. We will have an announcement later this week on next steps in our public health recommendations for schools.”

I expect the announcement referenced in Secretary French's communication will happen at either a press conference on Thursday or a superintendent's meeting on Friday afternoon. While I do not have advance notice of what the announcement will be, the VT AOE and VDH guidance has largely mirrored the CDC guidance. I anticipate this announcement will in some way bring the VT AOE and VDH guidance more in line with the CDC; and if I had to guess I think it is likely the 80% requirement will be dropped. Whatever the change the announcement makes, please be sure the GISU will evaluate what is shared and will take appropriate action. Generally speaking for the last two years the GISU has been able to implement most guidance changes within a week or so of their announcement and I would expect that it is likely we would be able to follow a similar timeline in this case too.

Please note that due to vacation there is no Covid Dashboard information in this community Letter. The Dashboard will resume next week.

Regardless of the changes, one of the most important things for everyone both inside and outside of schools to consider is how do we ensure that all peoples' individual decisions which are influenced by their unique personal circumstances are respected. No one should be made to feel uncomfortable or shamed about the decision to mask or not mask while behaving within the guidelines.

To this end, I'd like to reiterate the following from the last community letter:

We have lived with shifting COVID safety guidance for the past two years, and as a Supervisory Union, we have done an amazing job keeping each other safe. We are hopeful that this next phase of COVID recovery will allow for more joy and connection while we continue to build a culture of respect and kindness in our buildings. I remain grateful for the support you have provided throughout the pandemic and appreciate your patience as we continue forward. Thank you for all you do to continue to make the Islands a wonderful place to live and to learn.

Community Meeting on March 2, 2022

The access to the Superintendent's weekly Community Meeting is available below. I'm looking forward to talking about the changing masking guidance and town meeting day results. It would be great to have significant community input. As always, questions are welcome!

Wednesday, **March 2, 2022**, 6:00 p.m

Join with Google Meet meet.google.com/yzd-szwo-tqi

Join by phone (US) +1 573-349-3062 PIN: 810 989 343#

Thank you for helping to ensure that all members of the GISU learning community are curious, creative, courageous, and capable of pursuing their aspirations in a diverse and ever changing world.

Sincerely,

Michael J. Clark

Grand Isle Supervisory Union, Superintendent