



Dartmouth Public Schools

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Dear Dartmouth Families,

With Thanksgiving now only a memory and Christmas fast approaching, many folks may begin to feel a bit more anxious. Adding to the usual rush of the holiday season is the challenge of educating students and keeping our school buildings functioning in the midst of a pandemic. Every day presents a unique issue that sometimes takes several hours and effective teamwork to sort through and resolve. We are grateful for those who continue to collaborate with us to ensure the best decisions are made relative to contact tracing and quarantining. This includes our nurses, administrators and Director of Public Health Chris Michaud and town nursing department. Our ability to manage each instance with care and efficiency has been enhanced because of these knowledgeable people.

As of today we have had sixty confirmed cases of the Coronavirus in our school community. This number is updated each week on the district website under [DPSCOVID-19 Dashboard](#). In each case we have collaborated with the Director of Public Health, town nurse and our own nursing staff to conduct contact tracing and advise affected persons about quarantining and return to school dates. It's important to note that there is no evidence that any of these cases were a result of in school transmission nor do they represent what is referred to as a cluster. Our adherence to health and safety guidance has certainly benefited the district community in this regard.

We appreciate the help families have been giving by keeping children home when ill and notifying the school about positive testing results. Please continue to notify the school nurse if your child or anyone they have come into contact with has tested positive, is being tested or is exhibiting symptoms listed in the [Can My Child Go to School Today](#) flowchart that was sent home and is listed on the district website. This joint effort supports the district in its efforts to maintain a safe and healthy environment.

As indicated in a previous update, in the case of inclement weather, the district may be calling for a remote learning day rather than a snow day in certain circumstances and when feasible. In the event a storm results in a major power outage, remote days might not be doable. As always you will receive an announcement as to the plans for the day via text messages, Twitter, Facebook and "The Voice". We encourage you to be prepared for any scenario!

With the Christmas holiday approaching I'm reminding people to be mindful of Governor Baker's [travel guidelines](#) which read: "Effective August 1, 2020, all visitors and returning residents entering Massachusetts must follow new travel orders. All visitors entering Massachusetts, including returning residents, who do not meet an exemption are required to quarantine for 14 days or produce a negative COVID -19 test result." We understand the importance of being with family during the holiday season but the potential for contracting and spreading the virus increases when people gather in groups. We need everyone's help to keep our schools open.

I'd also like to remind everyone that flu vaccines are now required for all Massachusetts school students enrolled in Child Care, Pre-School and K-12 institutions. Students will be expected to have received a flu vaccine by December 31, 2020 for the 2020 – 2021 season. Elementary and secondary students in districts and schools that are using a remote education model are not exempt. Families are encouraged to submit documentation to their child's school nurse.

It's no doubt that COVID has taken much of our time. Despite the challenges that have arisen, we remain focused on enhancing teaching and learning, maintaining high expectations and encouraging students to be creative, inquisitive learners and providing some of the traditional activities that foster relationship building and nurture the emotional wellbeing of staff and students. As an example, professional development continues around a variety of topics such as Teaching in a Remote World, Teachers as Leaders, Teaching with Technology and Social and Emotional Learning. Teachers and teaching assistants are being offered several venues through which they can take self-directed courses. Also schools have hosted picture taking days and several clubs are up and running. As days go by more staff will develop more ideas on how to enhance the learning environment.

With the release of the MIAA's guidance for winter sports we are in discussion regarding the safe implementation of basketball and ice hockey. Due to careful planning and adherence to all appropriate guidance by coaches and students, the fall season went very well. Our success contributes to us feeling confident about the winter season. We are hopeful our athletes will be able to compete safely. We were also pleased with the efforts of our music folks. While the music program looked entirely different this year, students were still able to practice and perform. More is yet to come! With the help of DCTV both athletic and music events were taped and aired for all to view.

In times like these we can easily become overwhelmed and feel hopeless. Conversely, we can build resiliency and toughen our resolve. With determination we can overcome and come out of the storm stronger than before. Inspirational author and speaker Caryn Sullivan reminds us we are in control of our response to situations. She states, "In the face of adversity, we have a choice. We can be bitter, or we can be better. Those words are my North Star."

Speaking of a North Star, you might have seen a recent article describing a rare event coming up on December 21. What is called a Christmas Star will light up the sky for the first time in 800 years when Jupiter and Saturn align. Rice University Astronomer Patrick Hartigan stated "Alignment between these two planets are rather rare, occurring once every 20 years or so, but this conjunction is exceptionally rare because of how close the planets will appear to be to one another. You'd have to go all the way back to just before dawn on March 4, 1226 to see a closer alignment between these objects visible in the night sky." I am looking forward to viewing what will probably be a spectacular sight. Although not education related I thought such an interesting event might be of interest!

Thank you to everyone for everything you are doing to support each other, our families and most importantly our students. The words "we are in this together" have never rung so true.