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Happy New Year! We have the first week of 2022 completed and the 2nd semester is set to commence next week. The school year is moving along even if COVID is not. As the country continues to battle the new variant, school districts continue to battle the negative impact it brings to bear on us. Quarantines, contact tracing, supply chain issues, and substitute shortages have collectively made it hard to normalize our work here in the district. We applaud the efforts of both our staff and students as they embrace the never-ending cycle of change.

With the start of the new year, we once again have been dealt a new hand as it relates to COVID guidelines. The CDC has recently released new guidelines as it relates to quarantines, masking, and vaccination status. Administration and the Nurse's Office have spent this first week back from the break familiarizing ourselves with the new guidelines and various scenarios. Following a communication from the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) indicating that the Department of Health had accepted these new guidelines, West Branch is complying with PDE's directive to shift our practices accordingly.

In a nutshell, quarantines have been reduced to 5 days in normal instances with the additional days replaced with masking at school. Of course, symptoms and a fever could impact exactly how long someone quarantines. Parent opting not to have their child mask in school for the required number of days will need to have their child quarantine at home for the full duration. Mr. Williamson will continue to serve as our lead and work with both our employees and families on matters pertaining to contact tracing, quarantining, and masking. As we move through the next few months, questions on these matters may be directed to his attention.

On another matter, with the start of the new year, we have also transitioned into inclement weather. The district will be using Flexible Instructional Days (FID) again this school year. FIDs will be used on days when we are unable to bring students into the school. Students will be working at home on FIDs since this is counted as a school day. Students will either be working on lessons provided as packets and/or lessons loaded onto devices that can be accessed offline. No internet connection is required for work assigned on these days and as such all students are expected to complete the assigned work and submit it upon our return to school. Participation and the submission of work is required for a student to be counted as present for the day. If a child is sick and unable to complete their work on a given FID, an excuse is still required. Teachers will offer office hours for assistance with any assignment and will communicate with the parents/students the morning of each FID.

Stay Healthy!

Micki Dutrow