

January 7, 2022

Dear T/E Families,

As we close out the first week of 2022, I am writing to share several important and timely updates related to our schools and COVID-19 mitigation.

Before I review the details, I would like to thank all our families and students for your support, partnership, and flexibility this week. Please recognize that the current surge in COVID cases has led to an increase in absences for students and staff. This is no one's fault. We do not want symptomatic individuals or those who have tested positive to come to school. The demands on the staff who have been able to work have increased dramatically, with teachers, administrators, and support staff covering classes and supervising students in addition to their regular responsibilities. Please understand that to remain open, more classes may occur with substitutes and that it may take longer than usual to receive responses to emails and phone calls until the number of cases decreases.

### **Vaccine Clinic and Asynchronous Instructional Day for Students and Staff on January 14, 2022**

We have received many requests from staff and parents for another vaccine clinic opportunity and are pleased to announce that Springfield Pharmacy will offer another clinic for TESD staff and students. The clinic will offer both the vaccine (first or second dose) and the booster for those eligible. Students aged 5 and up may participate. The clinic is planned for Friday, January 14 at Valley Forge Middle School from 9:00 am to 3:00 pm. To provide this opportunity to as many students and staff as possible, **TESD will be switching to a remote-learning, asynchronous instructional day on January 14 and students will not report to school on this day.** We hope that supporting this additional clinic next Friday for those seeking the opportunity for a vaccine or a booster will help us maintain our goal of in-person instruction. We will soon share additional details on how to sign up for the clinic, as well as more information about Friday's asynchronous instruction.

### **Temporary Passive Camera Access to Classroom Instruction**

TESD remains committed to in-person learning and we believe our current instructional model is best for our students. As I shared in my last community letter, we have been evaluating options to provide additional support to absent students without changing our instructional model. In addition to posting asynchronous work on Schoology, we will begin offering temporary passive camera access in our classrooms from Tuesday, January 11 – Monday, January 31 for students who are absent from school. Passive camera access will allow absent students to observe classroom instruction remotely. **It is a tool to support absent students during the current COVID surge and is not the integrated instructional model we used last year.** We do not want this access to distract teachers from delivering the in-person experience, so several parameters will be in place. Below is a summary of the concept:

- Absent students may voluntarily log in to observe and listen to the class session, but they will not be able to actively participate during class. The teacher will not hear or call on the remote students.
- Teachers will use a fixed camera and the camera will not move during the lesson.
- Lesson materials may not be available through teacher screen-sharing during classroom instruction. Students may access classroom materials through Schoology or other established means.

- If all students are present in person, the remote camera will not be used for that session. If no students are logged in within the first five minutes of class, the camera will be turned off.
- Cameras will only be used by the regular classroom teacher. Cameras will not be used by substitute teachers.
- Passive camera access will be available during whole group English language arts and math instruction at the elementary level, during core classes at the middle school level, and during most daily classes at the high school level.
- Passive virtual camera access will not count as attendance at school. Students not physically present in school will still be marked absent, and parents must report these absences to the school attendance office daily.

While we continue to emphasize the importance of in-school instruction, we believe this short-term support may reduce the stress levels of students not attending due to COVID concerns. Last year, when camera participation needed to be more active and in place for a longer period, we did see evidence of decreased student attendance for non-COVID reasons. When school fully re-opened for in-person instruction, some students accustomed to remote camera access experienced greater challenges with re-acclimating to reporting to school on a daily basis. Passive camera access is intended to provide short-term support through this COVID surge and will end on January 31 so we can maintain the momentum for in-person instruction we have established with students this year. Families who wish to remain virtual past this time will be able to enroll in the Brandywine Virtual Academy (BVA). If you are interested in exploring the BVA option, please contact Dr. Anthony DiLella at [dilellaa@tesd.net](mailto:dilellaa@tesd.net).

### **Instructions for Passive Camera Access**

Passive camera access will be available through Schoology and Microsoft Teams. Please visit the [Passive Camera Access Information webpage](#) for additional instructions. Families are asked to please contact the [Family Help Desk](#) for technical assistance or questions regarding passive camera access rather than contacting the classroom teacher.

### **Full Virtual Instruction**

We have received some inquiries and requests for a temporary return to full virtual instruction. No health authorities are currently recommending that transition. If that should change, or if the number of staff and student absences becomes unworkable, we are prepared to make that shift rapidly. We consider this a measure of last resort and are deploying all reasonable options to maintain in-person instruction at this time.

Please note that future emergency closing days this school year will be emergency virtual days with instruction taking place both synchronously and asynchronously. We have [details about emergency virtual days](#) available on our website. Thank you again for your continued support of our COVID protocols as we work to keep our schools open for in-person instruction. Have a safe and warm weekend.

Sincerely,  
Dr. Richard Gusick  
Superintendent of Schools