

Grand Island Central School District

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Dear Grand Island Families:

On Friday, December 4, the New York State Department of Health, at the direction of Governor Andrew Cuomo, disseminated updated guidance regarding the COVID-19 testing requirements for schools. We applaud the Governor and the New York State Department of Health for listening to the voices of school superintendents in Western New York and across the state, who were unanimous in saying:

- **New York State's schools are safe** - students and staff have faithfully followed the safety protocols proven to limit the spread of COVID-19. As a result, virus transmission is far lower in schools than in other settings.
- **School-aged children need to be in school** - The social/emotional effects associated with some school-aged children being absent from in-person learning for another extended period of time include greater isolation, deepening of depression and anxiety, and an increase in self-harming behaviors.
- **The initial testing requirements were not sustainable for public school districts** - Updating the testing requirements for schools in a "Red" or "Orange" makes it possible for school districts to provide in-person learning in these zone designations.

The updated Interim Guidance states that:

- For schools located in a geographic area designated as an Orange Zone, a total of 20% of in-person students, faculty and staff must be tested for COVID-19 over the one-month period following the zone designation.
- For schools located in a geographic area designated as a Red Zone, a total of 30% of in person students, faculty and staff must be tested for COVID-19 over the one-month period following the zone designation.

In either zone, if random sampling generates 9 or more positive cases in any school, or if for a sample size of more than 300 weekly tests, achieves a positivity rate of 2% or higher (6 cases or more depending on sample size) in New York City, or 3% (9 or more cases depending on sample size) outside of New York City, of one such discrete sample, then the school will be required to return to remote instruction.

On Friday, December 4th our Limited Service Laboratory license was approved by the NYSDOH. We expect the BinaxNOW Rapid tests to arrive on Wednesday, December 9th. We have also applied to have access to the Electronic Clinical Laboratory Reporting System (ECLRS) database in order to upload the results of testing. This approval is expected to be given by the end of this week or early next week. Additionally, we are planning to provide our nursing team the necessary training required to conduct the tests on Monday, December 14th. As part of the training, we will test a portion of our faculty and staff on Tuesday, December 15. If all goes well, we are looking to safely welcome students back to our hybrid model (A-L) on Thursday, December 17 and (M-Z) on Friday, December 18.

We are grateful to the Governor and the New York State Department of Health for being responsive to our voice and to the data. We are also grateful for our students, staff and families who have faithfully followed the requirements of the “new now”; social distancing, masking, hand hygiene, monitoring of symptoms and quarantining as directed by the local health department.

Because of your compliance, schools are safe places for learning and work. In the days ahead, we will send more information regarding the new testing protocols as well as how to provide consent to test.

Thank you for reviewing this information and for planning to have your child or children return to our hybrid model (A-L) on Thursday, December 17 and (M-Z) on Friday, December 18. We look forward to your continued support as we work to operationalize testing in our schools. Please contact your child’s principal if you have any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,



Brian Graham, Ed.D.
Superintendent of Schools