

Good afternoon St. John School,

Thank you for your continued support through these past 22 months. It is hard to believe that we are coming up on nearly two years since we first went remote on March 13, 2020. We have been through many different configurations and policies during this time to reduce exposure and keep our community as safe as possible, while continuing to educate our student body. It seems like just when we get used to one set of policies, there is a shift from some entity (CDC, DPH, DESE, Canton, Archdiocese, etc.). While these shifts can be disruptive, they are necessary as the pandemic continues to evolve. Starting the week of January 31, we will go through another shift in policies. This policy change is recommended by DPH and DESE. These changes will likely happen in most schools across Massachusetts. To learn more about the Department of Education's rationale [click here](#) for a memo.

During the week of January 31, **St. John School will discontinue contact tracing in school** (the exact date will be determined later). We will instead shift our primary focus to identifying symptomatic individuals. Therefore, when there is a positive COVID case in school, we will not identify close contacts and there will be no individual close contact notifications. Since we will not be determining close contacts, **our test-to-stay program will be discontinued as well**. This means we will only be testing symptomatic students when symptoms arise at school. There are a few additional changes we will make the week of January 31 to align with DPH and DESE guidelines:

- Since we are discontinuing test-to-stay, we cannot allow unvaccinated close contacts from outside of school into school. These students must follow local quarantine guidelines. However, many local Boards of Health are also discontinuing much of their contact tracing efforts, so notification of being a close contact will likely stop.
- We will allow vaccinated close contacts from outside of school to remain in school (even if the positive case is in the home).
- We will return to our original remote policy – remote education will only be available to positive COVID cases.

We have notified the Canton Board of Health of our intention, which is a requirement to enact this change in policy.

Ending test-to-stay will open up a new resource for St. John School. We will now receive rapid antigen tests (iHealth COVID-19 Antigen Rapid Test) from DESE that will be sent home with staff and students. This program will begin next week for staff and the week of January 31 for students. This will be an opt-in program. If you participate in this program, you will receive a two-pack of tests every other week through at least April 22. It is the expectation that families will test their child once a week and report back any positive results. As we get closer to distribution, we will provide more details, including which day to test. This program is a good substitution for pool testing and will hopefully reduce the number of positive COVID cases at St. John School.

If you choose to opt in to at-home biweekly rapid antigen testing, please fill out this google form.

<https://forms.gle/uZJ1LUY33ujDa6H57>

I have also attached a copy for your reference, but you need to do this online. It will take two minutes and you need to complete one for each child you have at SJS. I implore you to opt into this program.

We will receive our first batch of tests for students during the week of January 31. Once we send them home, we will discontinue contact tracing and test to stay.

While I have you, I would also push all families to reevaluate the type of masks that your child is wearing to school. While we will make no official changes to our policy, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention is now recommending people opt for the highly-protective N95 or KN95 masks over cloth masks to ward off the highly-contagious omicron variant and slow the coronavirus spread. Personally, I have gone to this option (a KN95 plus a cloth mask) and have had no issues.

As always, please let me know if you have any questions and/or concerns.

Chris