

# Science Language & Arts

February 2, 2021

Dear families,

We've received a number of similar questions about the protocols for school closure with respect to COVID-19 cases, and I'd like to share this information with families as a whole:

## **Are any of the eight positive cases in the SLA community since January 11, 2021, due to on-site spread?**

No. We have thoroughly investigated every case with interviews of positive households, analysis of infection timelines, contact tracing, and post-case testing, and have not found any evidence of on-site COVID-19 transmission. Two cases were linked through exposure outside of school.

## **As a result of this latest closure, will SLA:**

### **1. Eliminate the planned remote learning period (Feb 22-26) for Main Campus students following Midwinter Recess?**

We are reviewing this policy and will inform families before the end of this week of any changes to the planned remote learning period after Midwinter Recess.

### **2. Consider cancelling or changing Midwinter Recess?**

SLA has no plans to change school recesses. Families may have already made plans for recesses, and cancellation on short notice can be an additional hardship.

For teachers, school recesses are not only a well-deserved break, but also an opportunity for them to conduct needed additional curriculum planning time outside of school. This is especially important this year, as all our teachers have been working harder than ever to plan for both remote and on-site learning.

## **Why does SLA close when there are two unlinked cases on-site, instead of only closing the impacted classrooms?**

School closure when there are two unlinked cases on-site is [standard DOE protocol](#). Unfortunately, SLA is far from the only school impacted by multiple on-site cases of Covid-19. More than [300 NYC public schools are currently closed](#) and many of our independent peer schools are reporting the same difficulty of multiple closures due to on-site cases.

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Multiple on-site cases have a number of implications for teacher and student health, as well as on-site learning, including:

- A high level of broader community spread impacting our school community, which will very likely result in further, immediate positive cases (as demonstrated by the past few weeks);
- Additional students and teachers unnecessarily exposed to COVID-19 and subject to a state-mandated quarantine period;
- Reduction of on-site operational efficiency due to more and more teachers being quarantined following exposure;
- Negative impacts upon the mental health of exposed and quarantined teachers and on-site teachers who are worried about additional, probable COVID-19 cases; and,
- Possible negative impacts upon the physical health of everyone who is exposed to COVID-19 due to the higher likelihood of becoming infected.

Finally, teacher feedback indicates most are not comfortable teaching on-site with such high frequencies of on-site COVID-19 cases.

## **Why is quarantine for close contacts required if students and teachers are masked and cohorted on-site?**

The DOHMH's guidance indicates that all students and teachers in a classroom for more than 10 cumulative minutes over the course of a day are considered close contacts who have been exposed to COVID-19, irrespective of whether or not they were wearing masks or were socially distanced in the classroom.

Please also note that we have received some confirmations outside of school that COVID-19 was transmitted between masked individuals.

## **Since it has been five days since the child was last on-site, can SLA require families to re-test immediately and then return to in-person learning if there are no positive cases on Monday, 2/8?**

If everyone tests now, and returns negative, this would not indicate that it is safe to return to school on Monday. We have witnessed multiple on-site cases in January in which families who tested negative became infected with COVID-19 as early as two days later.

As an example for how testing can fail to provide an accurate picture of infection rates, please view this graphic from the [Illinois Department of Public Health](#).

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Families who have been exposed to COVID-19 must complete a PCR test within 5–8 days from exposure, which helps us track the possibility of on-site transmission, but ending a quarantine period early based on test results is not recommended.

**The DOE uses a 10-day period before returning to school following two unlinked on-site positive cases. Why does SLA use a 14-day period?**

The DOE updated their policy in November 2020 to follow new CDC guidance that a 10-day quarantine period following COVID-19 exposure is *permissible*. The CDC maintains that 14 days is the *safest* and most scientifically supported quarantine period, as the incubation period of COVID-19 is 2–14 days from confirmed exposure. The [reason the quarantine guidance was decreased in November was to encourage wider compliance](#), not because it's equally safe. SLA continues to use a 14-day period following multiple confirmed on-site cases as a best practice.

**The DOE uses a 7-day interval for unlinked positive cases before school closure. Why does SLA use a 14-day interval?**

As with the reduced quarantine period, this DOE policy represents a change from prior protocols. Following CDC recommendations in August, SLA determined a 14-day interval for positive cases for the 2020-21 school year, based on the understanding that this number of cases for SLA's school size would represent a concerning degree of community spread impacting the school community. This is one of the policies under review at this time.

**Is SLA considering implementing on-site testing? Will this impact SLA's closure protocols?**

SLA expects to implement an on-site, weekly, and voluntary Covid-19 testing program after Midwinter Recess, using a third-party provider used by many other peer schools. Details will be provided in the coming weeks, before the return to school post-recess.

This testing program is intended as a community benefit to increase access to testing for students, families, and faculty. It may help SLA investigate the possibility of on-site community spread following positive cases, and helps ensure SLA is prepared in the event that the state mandated testing for non-public schools.

Testing programs will not replace our existing protocols. Current protocols regarding masking, social distancing, and closures will still be required, and positive on-site cases of Covid-19 still necessitate the same responses.

**What is the current status of teacher vaccinations?**

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As soon as the Covid-19 vaccine became available to teachers and school staff on January 8, 2021, SLA released information for scheduling vaccine appointments to teachers and provided all teachers with additional paid leave to allow them time to get vaccinated. The DOHMH is not requiring vaccination at this time, but we are taking every step to encourage our teachers to get vaccinated.

Sincerely,

Stanley Ramdhany  
Operations and Finance Manager  
Science, Language & Arts