



January 6, 2022

Dear Members of the Brooks School Community,

With a few days of Winter Term under our belts and all of our reentry test results now in, we wanted to follow up and share where we are with this especially contagious and far less virulent Omicron variant. We continue to be encouraged by the growing body of medical opinion indicating that serious illness and hospitalization are much less likely with Omicron than with any of the earlier variants -- particularly for those who are fully vaccinated and have received a booster. In addition, we have increasing reason to believe that this variant, which is leading to unprecedented increases in case levels on a daily basis, will run its course much more quickly than earlier variants. With that in mind, we are hoping and thinking that we may be in the early stages of rapid decline in case levels by the time our second semester begins on January 25.

Between now and then, however, and lingering into February, we will continue to see case levels that we have not experienced at any point in the pandemic. With that in mind, our test results have been in line with rates in Massachusetts, where roughly one in five tests is now positive.

- Between students and employees, we administered 442 PCR tests on Monday. We also administered a number of rapid antigen tests.
- Of the two groups, 29 students and 10 employees tested positive. When added to the 21 students and 6 employees who tested positive prior to our return to school on Monday, we have had 66 community members test positive. We expect this number to grow over the days and weeks ahead.
- While the isolation protocol we need to follow is disruptive and frustrating, we are glad to report that we have not yet received reports of any serious illness.

Going forward, we will be emphasizing the following:

Isolation - Anyone who tests positive will be required to isolate for five days subsequent to the date of the positive test result. This means that those who tested positive on Day 0 need to remain isolated off campus/at home during Days 1-5. The person can then return to school on Day 6, provided they can produce a negative rapid antigen test result that day. If a rapid antigen test result is still positive on Day 6, the person needs to stay in isolation and test again on Days 7-10 until a negative rapid antigen test is produced. All students and employees will be permitted to return to school no later than Day 11.

Masking - We will continue to require masks in all indoor spaces for the foreseeable future. This is particularly important for students and employees who return from isolation at some point between Days 6-10, and for students and employees deemed to be a close contact during Days 1-10.

Close Contacts - With a dramatically increasing number of positive and mild or asymptomatic cases, we have also identified a number of close contacts. Per CDC guidance, we are not requiring close contacts to quarantine, but they will need to mask appropriately when indoors and monitor for symptoms. Students will be notified of their status as a close contact. We will not be notifying parents and guardians of close contacts at this time. Any students identified as close contacts of positive cases will be tested again five days after exposure via rapid antigen testing.

Testing - With the exception of those who have approved vaccine exemptions, and when we need to for reasons centered on interscholastic athletic competition, we will not be administering routine

PCR tests to those who are asymptomatic and fully vaccinated (booster or not). We are planning to pivot to greater use of rapid antigen tests in an effort to keep better track of those who are positive and contagious, which is a greater concern to us during this Omicron variant spike.

Vaccine Booster - With all people who are age 12 and up now eligible for a booster, we will be requiring that all students and employees receive one as soon as possible and no later than March 9, 2022. We will be hosting vaccine clinics on campus in late January and early March to help with this effort.

Winter Athletics - As indicated last week, we are planning to continue with winter interscholastic sports, but we expect and are already experiencing postponements of games due to high COVID-19 levels. We are going to make every effort to keep our winter athletic season intact and will be working on a week-to-week basis to achieve the goal.

Winter Term - We appreciate that isolation protocols are extremely disruptive to Winter Term class attendance given their short duration. We will do the best we can with whatever circumstances we are facing and will find ways to get students through these courses if and when they need to miss time on campus due to COVID-19 isolation protocols.

We will continue to provide periodic updates as we move further into January. While we are expecting and bracing for more positive test results in the weeks ahead, we are encouraged by the far less virulent nature of the Omicron variant and the likelihood that this dramatic spike in cases may well begin coming down as fast as it has gone up. Between now and then, we are intent on doing our best to keep the school year moving forward. I am deeply grateful to be part of a community that is working so hard and cooperatively to realize this goal and support one another as we go.

If you have questions, please be in touch.

Best,

John R. Packard
Head of School