



West Contra Costa School Closures, COVID Testing Efforts Draw Mixed Reaction

By [Shawn Chitnis](#) January 6, 2022 at 7:02 pm

HERCULES (KPIX) – West Contra Costa Unified School District will close on Friday and Monday because of continued COVID-19 outbreaks. Administrators hope to stop the spread of the Omicron variant among staff and students before reopening campuses Tuesday.

“I have my concerns, yes, so we just stay at home,” one woman said while waiting to pick up her granddaughter. “We’re just taking all the precautions we can.”

The district said it will use the days to deep-clean its facilities and wants families to get tested before students return Jan. 11. The district also announced it will provide staff members one KN95 mask per week for the rest of the school year, requiring employees to wear that type of face-covering beginning Monday.

“To be in a situation where this variant is crushing our school system is upsetting,” said Marissa Glidden, the president of United Teachers of Richmond. “Our teachers are not confident that that’s a situation they’re going to be in. They’re hopeful because we just so badly want to be in a better situation.”

UTR, the union that represents teachers in the West Contra Costa Unified School District, says this is an daunting situation to navigate with so many shortages among school staff. The combination of absences by teachers and students makes it difficult to keep classrooms open.

“We had parents coming to our office to get test kits because the schools don’t have them so this is a mess, frankly,” said Contra Costa County supervisor for District 1 John Gioia. “I feel, as a parent and talking to other parents, the schools

are also in a jam because they're not getting the tests they need and it's not their fault."

Gioia gave out 1,600 test kits to residents and saw the supply run out within minutes. Gioia says there are not enough tests available nationwide, hurting districts like WCCUSD from operating safely during this wave of the Omicron variant. Even so, he does not want to see extended closures.

"It's not working right now, you can't operate schools without staff so, unless we're able to get substitutes, I don't know what else we do in this situation," Glidden told KPIX.

While Glidden and her members worry two days may not be enough, she acknowledges that closing beyond Tuesday may be tough at this time. She says the district is likely making the right call and she hopes enough people can come out of isolation by next week, adding that there is no consensus among educators about returning to remote learning.

"I think it's good that they're taking safety precautions, you know, trying to keep everyone safe," said Darin Loo, a parent waiting outside Hercules Middle School on Thursday. "I would prefer my daughter go to school versus distance learning. She had a hard time distance learning."

Parents and family members remember the challenges that students faced while trying to keep up with school at home so they are reluctant to go back to that method for now.

"It plays such a pivotal role on the children's mental state," the woman parked outside the school said. "My granddaughter, she cried, she wanted to go back to school, she wanted to socialize and it's hard, it's kind of a Catch-22."

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