



Bellefonte Area School District

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Inspiring and Preparing Today's Learners to Embrace Tomorrow's Challenges

May 14, 2021

Dear Bellefonte Area School District Parents, Families, Staff and Community:

Happy Friday! This letter includes a covid case count update, as usual, as well as a summary of Centre County data. I am also going to try to explain the latest changes in orders from the CDC, the PA Dept of Health (PA DoH) and the PA Dept. of Education (PDE), and our thinking about the implications for us as we finish this school year. This could be a long letter. First the case count update...

BASD Case Count Update

Since my letter and report on Monday, May 10, we received notification or confirmation of 7 new cases in our district, as follows:

- We received notification that a Bellefonte Elementary School student tested positive over the past week. The student had been in quarantine and was not in school while infectious. The case does not count by PDE guidelines, and no contact tracing was necessary.
- A Marion-Walker Elementary student tested positive earlier this week. The student was in school while infectious, and the case does count by PDE guidelines. Mrs. Krisch notified parents of students who may have been close contacts earlier this week.
- One high school student tested positive and was physically present while infectious. The case does count according to PDE guidelines. Parents of students who may have been close contacts were notified earlier this week.
- A staff member at Benner Elementary tested positive earlier this week. The staff member was in school while infectious, and the case does count per PDE guidelines. However, there were no close contacts identified for this case.

- We received notification that 3 Middle School students tested positive since Monday. All 3 students were in school while they were infectious, so the cases do count according to PDE guidelines. Mrs. Garman and the Middle School staff worked on the contact tracing earlier this week. Parents of students who may have been close contacts were notified.
- As a side note, a few of these cases are related to each other or to other cases, as a sibling or family member also tested positive.

Just to refresh your memory, per the PA Department of Education (PDE) mandates, we must keep track of the number of active cases in each district school based on a 14 day rolling calendar. Cases count in the rolling 14 day calendar only if the student/staff member was physically present in the building while infectious. The PDE rules about closures and case counts changed this week, as explained in the next section.

| Building | Total number of known, new cases since 5/10 | *Since 5/10, the number of new cases that do “count” - students/staff that have been physically present in the building while infectious |
|---------------------|--|---|
| High School | 1 (student) | 1 |
| Middle School | 3 (students) | 3 |
| Bellefonte Elem. | 1 (student) | 0 |
| Benner Elem. | 1 (staff member) | 1 |
| Marion-Walker Elem. | 1 (student) | 1 |
| Pleasant Gap Elem. | 0 | 0 |
| BeLA | 0 | 0 |

Local Case Count Data and Centre County’s Data

As I’ve mentioned a few times, the positive cases are dropping across the US, PA, and Centre County. The case counts for our local zip codes (16823 and 16841) are also dropping. I continue to track all of the data. In the reporting period, April 30 - May 6, the number of new cases in Centre County was 224. In this week’s reporting period, May 7 - May 13, the number of new cases in Centre County dropped to 156. The number of cases in the 16823 zip code dropped

from 30 to 28, and the number of new cases in 16841 dropped from 8 to 4. But, I would like to note that on several days, the number of new cases in 16823 was more than that of even State College zip codes. Just today, there are 11 new cases in Centre County and 6 of them are in the 16823 zip code.

Perhaps, the biggest takeaway from the decreasing number of cases in Centre County is that Centre County is not designated as a county with a Substantial Rate of Community Transmission now. Centre County had been in this designation since the last week of August 2020. When the new designations are published on the PDE and DoH websites on Monday, Centre County should be designated as a county with a Moderate Rate of Community Transmission. This would be 2 weeks in a row, and the PDE rules change for schools due to the lower rating. For example, the PDE Attestation form that legally requires schools to enforce all rules, mandates closures for in-person learning, etc. is only applicable if the county is designated as “substantial.” What is legally *required* for districts in counties with a Substantial Rate of Transmission is only *recommended* for districts in counties with a Moderate Rate of Transmission in terms of just the Attestation Form.

The Governor, the CDC, the PA DoH and the PDE

By now, I'm sure you've heard that the CDC and the PA DoH issued new guidance about wearing masks. The new guidance from the CDC and the PA DoH indicates that people who are fully vaccinated do not have to wear masks in most situations. There are exceptions, and schools are currently one of those situations. We are still governed by PDE and the mandates suggested for schools. We have been waiting patiently on more guidance from PDE for more than a week. Yesterday, PDE created a brief FAQ page for schools. The link below contains pertinent information for schools.

<https://www.education.pa.gov/Schools/safeschools/emergencyplanning/COVID-19/Waivers/TargetedMitigation/PK12/Pages/default.aspx>

In short, PDE is still mandating the same social distancing parameters for schools, and schools are still required to do contact tracing and work with the PA DoH for the remainder of the school year.

So, as you can tell now and as it has been this entire year, the CDC and the PA DoH issue guidance and then PDE may or may not issue direct guidance in response. We are left to interpret and to hope that everything doesn't change again. We've experienced ever-changing guidance and mandates all year and now is no different. On a personal note, I'm very frustrated by this, too.

This morning, our admin team met to discuss the latest developments, and I touched base with a few other superintendents. For now, we are going to follow what PDE is saying on the website and stay our course with mask wearing, physical distancing, etc. We, too, are covid tired and want normal as soon as possible. We have just 12 days of school left. We've made it this far and have done such a fabulous job. We have kept students and staff as safe as we possibly could. Thank YOU!

While a majority of our staff may be vaccinated, most of our students are not. Wearing a mask in school and at school related events does set a good example for our students and offers that layer of safety and protection for the students and staff. As a disclaimer, I am neither encouraging or discouraging vaccinations, as vaccinations are a very personal decision.

I know this letter is about as clear as mud. but in short, we are going to follow the PDE rules and keep doing what we have been doing all year for these last 12 days of school. Unless.....PDE changes the orders yet again or allows us to do more..... I'll let you know as soon as possible, if so.

Other Reminders

Parents should continue to notify building principals if their child(ren) tests positive for the coronavirus as soon as possible, so that we can provide information for parents and we can stay on top of any contact tracing that may need to occur.. The best way to get in touch with the building principal in the evenings, on the weekends or off times is via email, as our principals check email regularly even during the evening hours and on weekends. The quick notifications really have helped our administrators to act quickly to begin contact tracing and to lessen the spread of the disease over the past 8 months.

Again, we are urging everyone in our school community to continue to follow the guidelines and practices that can help lessen the spread of the virus. This includes washing hands frequently, wearing masks, social distancing and practicing personal responsibility. Now, as much as ever, we need to keep up the great work so that we can return to normal and finish our last 12 days of school this year safely together.

I hope you and your family stay safe, healthy and well! I hope you have a wonderful weekend!

Sincerely,
Tammie Burnaford
Superintendent
Bellefonte Area School District

