



Bellefonte Area School District

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

May 7, 2021

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

Happy Friday! I am sending this letter as a quick update for the covid cases in the district. Since Monday, we were notified of 5 new positive coronavirus cases in our district. I also want to share information regarding Governor Wolf's announcement this week.

BASD Case Count Update

Since my letter and report on Monday, May 3, we received notification of 5 new cases in our district, as follows:

- We received notification that a Bellefonte Elementary School student tested positive over the past week. The student was in school a week ago. The case counts by PDE guidelines, and contact tracing was completed on Monday.
- A Pleasant Gap Elementary student tested positive earlier this week. The student was in school while infectious, and the case counts by PDE guidelines. There were no students or staff identified that may have been close contacts.
- Two high school students tested positive and were physically present while infectious. Both cases count according to PDE guidelines. Parents of students who may have been close contacts were notified earlier this week.
- In an odd situation, a junior high volunteer coach/instructor tested positive for the coronavirus about 10 days ago. There were no close contacts identified, so no contact tracing was necessary. However, the person was in the Bellefonte Elementary School briefly during one evening, so the case counts by PDE guidelines. When we spoke to the PA DoH, the epidemiologist attributed the case to Bellefonte Elementary even though there were no Bellefonte Elementary students or staff present and deep cleaning

occurred, as usual. As mentioned, the person was last in the building on April 27th, so the case will come off the 14 day, rolling calendar on Monday anyway.

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. Active cases move in and out of the 14 day window based on the date of symptom onset or a positive case. The case counts and surrounding circumstances are shared with the PA Department of Health (DoH) after each new case is identified, and we are given recommendations about possible closures, if needed. As we have done all year, we will continue to follow the guidance of the PA DoH when new cases arise. We are still uncertain what this means for us after May 31st and into next school year, as explained below.

Building	Total number of known, new cases since 5/3	*Since 5/3, the number of new cases that do “count” - students/staff that have been physically present in the building while infectious
High School	2 (students)	2
Middle School	0	0
Bellefonte Elem.	2 (1 student, 1adult volunteer)	2 (see the earlier explanation)
Benner Elem.	0	0
Marion-Walker Elem.	0	0
Pleasant Gap Elem.	1 (student)	1
BeLA	0	0

Governor Wolf Lifts Mitigation Orders, Effective May 31, 2021

On Tuesday, May 4, 2021, Governor Wolf announced that all mitigation orders, except for masking, will be lifted on May 31, 2021. Furthermore, the Attestation form that I had to sign back in November will be dropped, too. If you recall, the Board President and the Superintendent of every school district were required to sign the Attestation form in order to keep schools open for in-person learning, and we had to guarantee that we would follow all PDE and Pa DoH guidelines and mandates to do so. With Centre County remaining in the Substantial Rate of Community Transmission designation, this form really tied our hands in some circumstances. But, thankfully, parents, staff, community and students were so supportive that we were able to keep our schools open as much as possible, and keep our students and staff safe.

Governor Wolf's announcement also indicated that municipalities and school districts can continue to have their own orders in place. But, his announcement also raised many questions for school districts. For example, some of the masking rules do include physical distancing, too. Will students have to be 6 feet apart at lunch, with or without masks? The CDC has recommended 3 feet is OK, but the PA DoH never fully adopted that rule. Do we still need to contact trace if someone is positive and within 6 feet for longer than 15 minutes with or without a mask on? So, we aren't completely clear about the 6 feet distancing in our schools after May 31st. The Superintendents were told on Tuesday that PDE will be issuing new guidance and will answer many of the questions that have been raised within the "next few days." As of this writing, we are still waiting. We've learned over the past year that many times as soon as we made a decision or plan that plan was overturned by PDE shortly after making it.

I want this whole pandemic to end and to have as much "normal" as possible, as much as anyone I know. I'm so excited that we may be moving out of this pandemic. I'd like to say that we can just forget all of the rules for the last few days of school after May 31st, but I'm still a bit cautious. We need clarification from PDE first, and as I have been saying the safety of our students and staff must be our top priority. Overall, cases are dropping across the state and in Centre County. But, as of this writing, we still have active cases in our schools. Perhaps in a week or so, there will be a drastic drop, and we will all feel a little more comfortable. I'm asking for your patience and understanding over the next few weeks. Please know we will do what we can to have the best and safest ending to the school year for all of our students. We will certainly share information and details about the last few days of school in June as soon as possible.

Other Reminders - These are still in place until at least May 31, 2021

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.

Of course, the PDE mandates, the DoH directives, increases in new cases or unforeseen issues can happen rapidly, and we may need to change our plans at a moment's notice. If closures must occur, all other school-related activities and athletic events will be postponed, as well, during any closure. If any of this latest information changes or our status must change, we will let you know as soon as possible.

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 in order to keep our students, staff and community safe and healthy. Please use good judgement and practice safety at all times, so that we can return to normal and finish our last 17 days of school this year safely together.

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

Sincerely,
Tammie Burnaford
Superintendent
Bellefonte Area School District