



**Bellefonte Area  
School District**

## **Bellefonte Area School District**

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

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**September 27, 2021**

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

Happy Monday! The weather was beautiful this weekend. I hope you and your family had a chance to enjoy your weekend. As promised, this letter contains a lot of information. It's rather long. My sister would never get through it (lol). First I share some positive covid case updates and the rest of the letter is general information about covid and our schools. I shared links from the PA Department of Education (PDE) and the PA Department of Health (PA DoH) websites. I also tried to answer some frequently asked questions that we have gotten recently.

### **BASD Case Count Update**

Since my letter and report on Friday, September 24, 2021, we received notification and confirmation of 4 new cases in our district. Two cases at the high school were reported Friday evening, and the two cases at the middle school were reported this weekend. The new cases are as follows:

- Two high school students tested positive late last week. Both students were in school while infectious, but there were less than 5 total students who were identified as close contacts for these two cases and were required to quarantine.
- We were notified that 2 middle school students tested positive over the weekend. One of the students has not been in school, and thus wasn't in school while infectious. No contact tracing was necessary in this case. The other student was in school while infectious. Mrs. Garman was working on contact tracing late into the evening last night. The total number of quarantined students from this case was not available as of this writing.
- Also, one of the earlier positive cases may have a sibling at the high school who may have tested positive. If so, Mr. Fedisson and Mrs. Michaels will work on contact tracing if there is a confirmed, positive case.

Here is a summary of the new, confirmed cases in the chart form since Friday, September 24.

<b>Building</b>	<b>Total number of known, confirmed, new cases since 9/24</b>	<b>*Since 9/24, the number of new cases - students/staff that were physically present in the building while infectious</b>
High School	2 (students)	2
Middle School	2 (students)	1
Bellefonte Elem.	0	0
Benner Elem.	0	0
Marion-Walker Elem.	0	0
Pleasant Gap Elem.	0	0
BeLA	0	0

**A reminder about local cases and a recent example**

Like last year, I continue to follow the case counts in our local zip codes. As you may recall, we have 2 main zip codes within the Bellefonte Area School District - 16823 and 16841. But, both of these zip codes spread into 2 other school districts (Bald Eagle Area and Keystone Central), so it’s difficult to pinpoint where new cases may be. Similar to last year, the PA DoH has the same reporting periods which run from Friday to Thursday. For a recent example, over the past reporting period (September 17-23), there were 50 new, confirmed cases in the 16823 zip code and 23 new, confirmed cases in 16841 according to the data taken directly from the PA DoH dashboard daily. As a comparison, the case counts for this reporting period are similar to those in the spring, especially for 16823. The numbers for 16841 are slightly higher than in the spring.

**Some Frequently Asked Questions:**

1. What is the definition of a “close contact?”

This is the same as last year. According to the PDE and PA DoH websites a close contact is:

“A person who was within six feet of an infected person for 15 consecutive minutes starting from two days before illness onset (or for asymptomatic infected people, two days prior to positive test collection) until the time the infected person is isolated.

Although the close contact definition is generally 15 consecutive minutes, there are circumstances where 15 cumulative minutes, or less than 15 minutes, may be used,” according to the PA DoH.

2. What is the rule about quarantines if students are wearing a mask this year?

Again, according to the PDE website:

“In the K–12 indoor classroom setting, the close contact definition excludes students who were within three to six feet of an infected student (laboratory-confirmed or a clinically compatible illness) if both the infected student and exposed student(s) correctly and consistently wore well-fitting masks the entire time. This exception **does not apply** to teachers, staff, or other adults in the indoor classroom setting.”

My email on Friday may have been confusing in this area. The quarantine exceptions only apply to students who test positive and students who are close contacts. If the positive case involves a staff member, there are no exceptions even if staff and students are wearing masks.

3. What is this school-based testing that is in the news?

From the PA DoH website:

“The Pennsylvania Department of Health (DOH), in partnership with [Concentric by Ginkgo Bioworks](#) ([Opens In A New Window](#)) (Ginkgo), is offering COVID-19 testing services at no cost to all K-12 Schools across the Commonwealth, with the exception of schools within Philadelphia county, for the entire 2021-2022 school year. This K-12 testing program is voluntary and free for schools and participants. Participating schools can choose from three testing options when opting in the program: pooled testing, individual diagnostic PCR testing, and individual diagnostic rapid point of care (POC) antigen testing.”

In talking with other superintendents, this program does not seem to be firmly in place yet for our local districts. Other superintendents report that there is no available staff from Concentric by Ginkgo Bioworks for our schools. There are also a number of unanswered questions in the information we have received. For this and several other reasons, we will not be participating in any of the options at this time. We may consider the individual diagnostic testing programs in the future if it will help our students and parents. But, we will notify parents first if we choose to go in that direction. Please note, too, that parental permission always will be secured before we would do any covid testing within our schools.

4. Will schools close if there is an outbreak?

According to the PDE website, schools that are experiencing an outbreak should work with the DoH to determine if a closure is necessary. Closures can involve a class, a

section of a school, or an entire school. We have a direct connection to a representative from the PA DoH and talk with her often. She will work with us to determine if a closure would need to occur. I will say that the thresholds for closure are much higher this year, and school districts are strongly encouraged by PDE and the PA DoH to remain open for in-person learning this year.

5. What other mitigation/prevention measures are in place in our schools besides masking? This year, we kept nearly every strategy that was in place last year. For example, student desks are placed at least 3 feet apart in the classrooms, and in many classrooms, the physical distancing is 6 feet. Frequent cleaning and sanitizing all spaces is still occurring. We are limiting outside visitors to our schools. These are only a few of the several strategies we have in place again this year.

Additionally, we've also added some layers of prevention this summer and since school started. For example, the ventilation system at the middle school received a major upgrade over the past summer. In addition, to gain more space between students eating lunch, our elementary schools have returned to having some or all students eat in their classrooms.

**Some links to get more information:**

Please click on the links below to get more information. I've included the main links for the PDE and PA DoH websites that we refer to often.

PDE's What's New website:

<https://www.education.pa.gov/Schools/safeschools/emergencyplanning/COVID-19/Pages/WhatsNew.aspx>

PDE's home page for schools and covid (with additional links):

<https://www.education.pa.gov/Schools/safeschools/emergencyplanning/COVID-19/SchoolReopeningGuidance/ReopeningPreKto12/Pages/default.aspx>

Responding to Cases page on the PDE website:

<https://www.education.pa.gov/Schools/safeschools/emergencyplanning/COVID-19/SchoolReopeningGuidance/ReopeningPreKto12/RespondingtoCases/Pages/default.aspx>

PA DoH Alert that explains isolation and quarantine based on vaccination status:

<https://www.health.pa.gov/topics/Documents/HAN/2021-583-7-30-UPD-Fully%20Vaccinated.pdf>

PA DoH information about school based testing:

<https://www.health.pa.gov/topics/disease/coronavirus/Pages/Symptoms-Testing.aspx>

### **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 12 months. And, again, students and staff who are experiencing symptoms, not feeling well or may have been a close contact to a person who tested positive should stay home.

On a personal note, I would like to offer a heartfelt thank you for your patience, understanding and support throughout these difficult times. I truly appreciate it. I feel so blessed to be part of such a wonderful school community. I hope you and your family stay safe, healthy and well! Best wishes for a fabulous week ahead!

Sincerely,

Tammie Burnaford

Superintendent

Bellefonte Area School District