



**Bellefonte Area
School District**

Bellefonte Area School District

**318 North Allegheny Street
Bellefonte, PA 16823
Telephone: (814) 355-4814**

**Mrs. Tammie L. Burnaford, Superintendent
Mr. Kenneth G. Bean, Jr., CMA, Director of Fiscal Affairs**

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

April 16, 2021

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

Happy Friday! I am sending this letter to give a quick update for the covid cases in the district. As I have been mentioning, we have seen a significant uptick in positive cases of the coronavirus in our zip codes and district, particularly over the past two weeks. From April 1 - April 12, we were notified of 9 new cases. And since Monday, we were notified of 12 new cases (all students). So, since April 1, we have been notified of a total of 21 new cases (1 staff member and 20 students) in the district.

BASD Case Count Update

As a recap, since my letter and report on Monday, April 12, we received notification of 12 new cases in our district, as follows:

- Two students at Bellefonte Elementary School tested positive for the coronavirus this week. One of the students was present in school while infectious. The case counts by PDE guidelines. Mr. Park completed the contact tracing yesterday, and parents of students who may have been close contacts were notified. The other student who tested positive had not been in school since last week and was not in school while infectious. The case does not count by PDE guidelines, and no contact tracing.
- We received notification that five middle school students tested positive over the past week. Three of those students have not been in school since late March, so their cases do not count by PDE guidelines, and no contact tracing was needed. Another student who tested positive was not in school since last week and not present in school while infectious. That case does not count by PDE guidelines. Late this afternoon, we received notification of another middle school student who tested positive. This student was in school earlier this week and was present while infectious. The case counts. Mr. Baughman was working on contact tracing late this afternoon.

- A Marion-Walker Elementary student tested positive for the coronavirus earlier this week, but the student has not been in school this week and not present while infectious. This case does not count by PDE standards.
- The rest of the new, known district cases involve four Benner Elementary students. Two of the students have not been in school since last Friday. They were not present in school while infectious and do not count by PDE standards high school students. The other two students were in school earlier this week and were physically present while infectious. The cases count, and Dr. Vancas notified parents of students who may have been close contacts.

The Benner Elementary outbreak is interesting in that there isn't an exact, clear connection between the cases, but all four students are in the same classroom. There are no other active cases in the school. Two students weren't present while infectious and haven't been in school since last week. Only two of the cases actually count by PDE guidelines. All safety precautions and procedures have been followed very closely all year long. Nevertheless, this is a unique situation that has not occurred in our schools to date. In a small school like Benner, the PDE threshold for closing is 2-4 cases for 2-3 days. Dr. Vancas contacted the PA DoH for guidance and for recommendations. Out of an abundance of caution and due to the unique circumstances, the PA DoH recommended that we close just that particular classroom and move to remote instruction for that class from yesterday through Sunday (4 days). In the mandates from PDE, technically, the "clock" for the 14 day, rolling calendar of active cases resets after a closure. Barring any complications, the students in that class will return to in-person learning on Monday, April 19.

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 discussed with the PA Department of Health (DoH) after each new case is identified, and we are given recommendations about possible closures, if needed. The PDE guidelines for closures changed last week and include shorter lengths of closures if closures are recommended by the PA DoH. As we have done all year, we will continue to follow the guidance of the PA DoH when new cases arise.

Building	Total number of known, new cases since 4/12	*Since 4/12, the number of new cases that do “count” - students/staff that have been physically present in the building while infectious
High School	0	0
Middle School	5	1
Bellefonte Elem.	2(students)	1
Benner Elem.	4 (students)	2 (the calendar resets on Monday with the closure)
Marion-Walker Elem.	1	0
Pleasant Gap Elem.	0	0
BeLA	0	0

The Worries

Our current surge in cases is equal to or exceeds the number of cases we have had in the district before the holidays. But, on a positive note (pun not intended), we have been fortunate that many cases have not counted by PDE standards because the students were not in school. Parents have been a great help keeping their students home if they exhibited symptoms or may have been a close contact or in a large gathering. We truly appreciate it! We are still strongly urging parents to keep students home if they are exhibiting covid-like symptoms or if they may have been exposed to a positive case of the coronavirus. We need to work together and be vigilant in our safe practices in order to curb the spread of the virus.

It was brought to my attention today that PDE added the following information to the PDE website (<https://www.education.pa.gov/Schools/safeschools/emergencyplanning/COVID-19/SchoolReop>)

[eningGuidance/ReopeningPreKto12/PublicHealthGuidance/Pages/SchoolClosureRecommendations.aspx](#)) :

If a school building meets the case thresholds to temporarily close, can any student population still attend in person?

When building closure is required, the school must suspend all in-person activities, including athletic and extracurricular activities, associated with that school - regardless of location (e.g. "away" games). This allows public health staff the necessary time to complete case investigations and contact tracing, and to provide the school with other appropriate public health advice like cleaning and disinfecting.

This means that if we have to close schools, we will not be permitted to have **any** extracurricular, athletic or special activities during the closure. As we finish our last 6 weeks of school, we have many exciting, athletic competitions and special events to end the school year. With the surge in cases recently, we really have to stay very vigilant in our safety practices, so that we can keep our schools open while we are keeping our students and staff safe.

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 7 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. The uptick in cases is concerning. 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 30 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