



Bellefonte Area School District

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

Mrs. Tammie L. Burnaford, Superintendent
Dr. Kristopher M. Vancas, Director of Curriculum and Instruction
Mr. Kenneth G. Bean, Jr., CMA, Director of Fiscal Affairs

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

April 19, 2021

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

Happy Monday! We were notified of 3 new covid cases in the district since my letter on Friday. A summary of those cases, as well as some information that parents have shared with us recently about their students' illnesses, are included in this letter.

BASD Case Count Update

Since my letter on Friday, April 16, we received notification of 3 new covid cases in our district, as follows:

- A Middle School student tested positive for the coronavirus over the past week. The student has not been in school since April 9, so the case does not count by PDE guidelines, and no contact tracing was needed.
- A Benner Elementary student tested positive for the coronavirus this weekend. This case has no known connection to the cases that occurred in the impacted classroom at Benner last week. The student was in school while infectious, so the case does count by PDE guidelines. Dr. Vancas notified parents of students who may have been close contacts yesterday.
- A High School student tested positive for the coronavirus this weekend. The student has been enrolled in remote learning, so he/she was not present in the *high school* while infectious. However, the student does participate on a Bellefonte Area SD athletic team and was present with the team while infectious. We learned of this case late yesterday, and contact tracing was still occurring late into the evening. At this time, I'm unsure if the case counts in the PDE mandates, but I am guessing it does. We will talk with the PA DoH about this case today.

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 about 2 weeks ago 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 4/16	*Since 4/16, the number of new cases that do “count” - students/staff that have been physically present in the building while infectious
High School	1 (student)	0
Middle School	1 (student)	0
Bellefonte Elem.	0	0
Benner Elem.	1 (student)	1
Marion-Walker Elem.	0	0
Pleasant Gap Elem.	0	0
BeLA	0	0

Some Words on the Street

As I have mentioned, we are experiencing a significant surge in positive covid cases in our district, in Centre County and in Pennsylvania. Our current surge in BASD cases is equal to or exceeds the number of cases we have had in the district before the holidays. However, lately I have noticed that the circumstances have changed since the winter outbreaks.

Since April 1, there have been 24 new, known cases of the coronavirus in the district. Of these cases, all but one has been in our students (96% are students). This does make sense somewhat in that an estimated 75% or more of our staff have been vaccinated (we don't have exact data). But, in the winter, most of our student cases were in high school or middle students. In April, about half of our known, new student cases have been in elementary students (including both cases that count and those that do not by PDE standards).

Also noteworthy is what we have heard from several parents recently when their children have contracted the virus. Many have expressed some surprise that their children tested positive because the symptoms are not as recognizable and seem to come on very quickly. Some have shared that their children have had gastrointestinal symptoms while others have mentioned that their children only had a sore throat and no other symptoms. Several have indicated that their children became sick in a short period of time, in a few hours or overnight. Perhaps more importantly, compared to our discussions with parents in the winter, the students who are testing positive now seem to be more ill recently. While a few have tested positive while being asymptomatic recently, it seems that this is occurring less often than it did in the winter. I just thought I'd share our recent communications from parents as a means to help other parents who may have concerns about their children.

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. We are still 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.

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 marvelous Monday!

Sincerely,
Tammie Burnaford
Superintendent
Bellefonte Area School District