



## **Happy Friday!**

Another amazing week in the Bellefonte Area School District! As promised, I'll be providing covid information weekly in a brief email on Fridays. This email also begins with information about the horrific tragedy that occurred in Texas this week and some information about safety and security in our schools. This is a long email, but I have a lot to share.

### **Robb Elementary School in Uvalde, Texas**

I remember exactly where I was when I first heard the tragic news from Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut on December 14, 2012. I was the principal at Pleasant Gap Elementary School. I simply could not understand why someone would harm such young and innocent children in a senseless act of violence. I felt deeply for the principal and teachers who died trying to protect the children, the parents of all of the children who died, the families, friends, loved ones and the entire Sandy Hook community. I had no words then, and I am struggling to find the words now.

I know our school community was shocked and deeply saddened by the news of the shooting at Robb Elementary School in Uvalde, Texas on Tuesday. In our own school district and school community, we share in the heartbreak for the families who have lost a loved one and for the entire school community there. Please join us in keeping the students, staff, and families of the Uvalde Consolidated Independent School District in our thoughts at this time.

We know that children and teens will process this news in different ways. Counselors are available at each of our schools to assist students who may need some extra support at any time. Our counselors also have many resources that also can be shared with parents. We strongly encourage parents and students to reach out to their building principals and school counselors if they have concerns or need support.

### **Safety and Security at BASD**

Our schools should and must be a place where students feel completely safe and secure. The parents of our students entrust us with the care of their children each and every day. That is a responsibility that we take very seriously. In the last 10 years and since Sandy Hook, our district has taken many measures to increase the safety and security of our students and

staff. We have attempted to be as proactive as possible. In many cases, we already had measures in place before they were made into law by the state legislature. This isn't a topic that I have shared with parents in the past 2 years, so I'd like to share a list of *some* of the measures we have taken over the past 10 years:

- All exterior doors of all district buildings are locked during the school day and beyond. Interior doors are also locked.
- Secure entrance ways with vestibules were constructed at each school. If you haven't visited a school, this means that the main entrances of the building have 2 locked doors to get through before entering the building.
- We have an identification system that requires visitors to provide photo identification (drivers licenses) before entering the building.
- We work closely with law enforcement from the Borough of Bellefonte and Spring Township, as well as the local PA State Police. We have an excellent relationship, and agreements, with the local police departments and the state police. We have a number of children of these police officers in our schools. They offer any help they can and undoubtedly have an unwavering commitment to our children.
- We have 2 dedicated School Resource Officers (SRO) whose main offices are located at the middle school and the high school, but they visit and cover Bellefonte Elementary and all of the other schools as well. These 2 SRO's are with us in cooperation with the Bellefonte Borough police. CPI has its own SRO through the Spring Township police. This SRO has also helped with incidents at Pleasant Gap Elementary in the past.
- We have a district-wide Safety Committee that includes school and district personnel, law enforcement, etc.. This committee meets monthly to review safety protocols and to address any concerns that arise. We have Safety Committees in each of our schools that include staff from those schools and do the same.
- We have many district administrators who have specialized training in safety/security. Our teachers and staff have been trained, as well. We also have used this training to create and participate in all types of crisis drills.
- Over the past year, a Risk Assessment team from the PA State Police did a risk assessment at each of our schools. This is a special team that does analyses for schools. We were on a waiting list for almost 4 years, but we were able to get our schools done this year. This information was shared with our district and school teams and any necessary and applicable actions have been or will be taken.
- As the PA legislature has created laws and regulations for school security, we have not only complied with the laws but we've also been ahead of the enactment of the laws. For example, we have had an internal threat assessment team process in place for at least 6 years in our schools. Just last year a law was passed requiring all schools to have threat assessment teams. We only need to create Board policy to document our plan.

This list is not all-inclusive by far. There are several safety strategies, measures and protocols in place that I can't explain here because it could interfere with the operational security of our schools. For example, if I were to explain where we have security cameras, that could be used to compromise security.

The staff in the Bellefonte Area SD, the police and the our community will continue to do everything in our power to protect our children from the evil in this world today.

## **Covid Case Counts**

Since last Friday (5/20), we have received notifications of 16 new covid cases in the district. These new cases involve 3 High School students, 2 High School staff members, 2 Middle School Students, 1 Middle School Staff member, 2 Bellefonte Elementary students, 1 Bellefonte Elementary staff member, and 5 Marion-Walker Elementary students. Note that several of these cases are related to each other (ex: students may be siblings) or related to family members who tested positive last week.

As a reminder, the rules for contact tracing/quarantine were changed for schools by the PA Department of Education (PDE) and the PA Department of Health (PA DoH) several weeks ago. We are still required to report new cases to the PDE/PA DoH, but we are no longer required to report the number of close contacts/quarantines.

## **Centre County CDC Covid Designations**

As reported and described in last week's email, the CDC uses 2 different designations for covid. This week, Centre County is designated as having a high covid transmission rate using the previous metrics, and according to yesterday's CDC report of community level, Centre County is designated as now having a "high" community level rate.

I continue to follow the case counts in our local, district zip codes (as a reminder, we share our zip codes with other school districts), and we document the new cases that we get in our schools each week. Overall, compared to last week, the new positive case counts are up in the 16823 zip code, down in the 16841 zip code and down within our schools.

As mentioned, we are still required to report school cases to the PA DoH/PD until June 10th, so I will keep sending these covid updates for the remainder of the school year which is only 8 student days.

## **The Last Day of School for Students**

Please note, the last day of school is June 9th, and students will be dismissed early the last day. Middle school and high school students will be dismissed beginning at 9:30 AM, and elementary students will be dismissed beginning at 10:30 AM. We are often asked why the last day of school is only a few hours. In short, this counts as a full day of attendance for our students. We dismiss early, so that they can get started on their summer vacations as soon as possible. A quick start for a well-deserved summer vacation and relaxation!

Barring any breaking news, I'll send my next update on Friday next week. I have been asked to share another story about my sister, and I will do so next week. As always, thank you so very much for your continued support, patience and understanding! I hope you and your family have a fabulous weekend and Memorial Day holiday!

Tammie Burnaford  
Superintendent  
Bellefonte Area School District