



**Bellefonte Area  
School District**

## **Bellefonte Area School District**

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**Mrs. Tammie L. Burnaford, Interim Superintendent  
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*Inspiring and Preparing Today's Learners to Embrace Tomorrow's Challenges*

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**Dec. 7, 2020**

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

Happy Monday! Only 24 days left in the year 2020! I have a lot of information to share in today's update, so please bear with me. In the past week, we've started following the new PA Department of Education (PDE) requirements, and on Friday, the PA Department of Health (PA DOH) issued new quarantine rules which align to new guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). All of this new information and the implementation of the new guidance can be overwhelming and confusing. I'm going to try my best to explain this and how it applies to our schools, all while COVID-19 is spreading rapidly and things could change quickly. I'm sorry this is a very long letter. Please feel free to skim, skip or if you are like my sister, it's Ok to jump to the end first for the summary for the Status of our Schools. In short, all of our schools will remain open for in-person learning for now.

### **A Recap of the PDE Requirements and What I learned from PDE This Past Week**

To recap, during the week of Nov. 23, 2020, the PA Department of Education (PDE) issued mandates regarding how our schools may operate. The superintendent and school board president of nearly every district in the state were required to sign and submit an Attestation Form in order to provide any in-person instruction, in full or in part, in any district schools. In the new orders and according to the Attestation form, all school districts are required to follow the PDE chart, Recommendations for Schools Following Identification of Positive Case(s) of COVID-19. More information about this can be found on PDE's website.

The PDE chart includes "recommendations" for schools based on the size of the school (number of students) and number of positive cases in a school during a 14 rolling, calendar time period. On Friday, I participated in a zoom meeting with Dr. Brian Campbell and Dr. Brian

Gasper in the PDE office. They further explained this PDE chart and provided many answers to our questions. Specifically, they explained how the 14 day rolling calendar works in determining closures and how to interpret the ranges found on the chart. Here are some of the areas of confusion that we had and received some clarification about:

- The PDE chart that has the “recommended” length of closures based on number of cases and the size of the schools is confusing, especially for the ranges of closures. We learned from PDE that those ranges (ex. Closure for 3-7 days for a medium size school with 4-6 cases) are ranges so that we can work with the DOH to adjust to our own needs. If we can complete contact tracing and cleaning in a shorter period of time, we can talk with our local DoH to shorten the length of closure. The current issue, however, is that our local DOH is so overwhelmed that we are having a very difficult time getting in touch with them even for lesser issues.
- The “14 day rolling calendar” for cases wasn’t clear. PDE confirmed that the 14 day calendar resets after a school closure. So, in our situation, even though there were six new cases at the HS while it was closed, the 14 day rolling calendar resets today or with the first identification of a new case after reopening. And, those six cases do not “count” because we weren’t in school (no contact tracing needed at school). This does make some sense, in that, there was obviously no transmission in the school during the closure.
- As of right now, PDE is keeping the 14 day rolling calendar and not reducing it to 10 days to match the DOH guidance for quarantining.
- So, this begs the new question: what is a “case” in our schools? What counts? This was also clarified by PDE during our zoom meeting. If a student or a staff member has not been in school or our facilities for a long period of time (ex: 14 days) and then tests positive, the case does not count in the fourteen day rolling calendar. This has happened and is happening a lot. Many of our cases are coming because a parent or close family member tests positive, the student or staff member quarantines, and then the student or staff member has symptoms and/or tests positive sometime later. This is also a testament to our parents who are working so hard to support us. Parents, families and staff have been great about notifying us immediately, so we are able to do our own contact tracing, if needed, to mitigate any spread at school. Parents and families are keeping their students home when someone in the house tests positive or their children have symptoms. To date, we still have no known transmission in our schools (student to student, student/staff, staff/staff) except for when the student/staff live in the same house. It’s so amazing how well we have done together!

## **The New CDC Quarantine Guidelines and the PA DOH**

The length of quarantine was shortened by the DOH, following the most recent guidance from the CDC. In short, according to Secretary Levine's press release on Friday, Dec. 4, 2020: "the CDC has affirmed that quarantine can end after 10 days if the person doesn't develop symptoms, or after seven days if the person tests negative and has no symptoms."

So, a person can quarantine for only seven days, if he/she is tested on the fifth day and that test is negative. Up to this point, we have not required our employees or students to have a negative test to return. However, if this option is chosen, an employee or student would need to provide evidence of the negative test if he/she wants to come back in just seven days. Please keep in mind that a person's quarantine can end in 10 days without a test, too. In both options, the persons will be required to monitor for symptoms for the full 14 day period, which was previously in place. We will follow these guidelines for quarantines, effective immediately, in our district.

The full press release and the statements made by Dr. Levine of the PA DoH can be found here: <https://www.media.pa.gov/pages/health-details.aspx?newsid=1176>

## **BASD Positive COVID-19 Cases**

Updating our case count is getting complicated and is confusing due to the new guidelines issued by both the PA DOH and PDE. And, this is where it's very difficult for me to share and to explain the number of cases in our schools. I truly want to be completely transparent, but now we are required to follow the PDE guidelines. I'm so torn between giving too much information and not giving enough information. I know it's all very confusing. So, I'm going to do the best I can.

If you go back to last week's letter, then we had five active, positive high school cases (those cases are now concluded because we closed the high school); one active positive case at Pleasant Gap (14 day window is concluded); and two active positive cases at the middle school (those two cases will conclude tomorrow). The Thanksgiving holiday closure provided a lot of time that we weren't in school during this past 14 day window.

Technically, since Tuesday, Dec. 1, we have had 0 new, known cases in any of our schools based on the guidelines set forth by PDE (maybe 1, as of late last night - we are still working on it). Yes, I know that seems impossible, especially with the recent surge of new cases locally, at the state level and at the national level, but let me explain. The high school resets its count and 14 day rolling calendar today or until another new case is identified in the school because we were closed and utilized remote learning last week at the high school. None of the six new HS cases identified over the past week "count". Although there were new cases

in all other BASD schools, none of those cases involved persons who were in the schools, no contact tracing was needed and no parents needed to be informed that their students were in close contact with a positive case at school. With the new 7/10 days quarantine changes, even the quarantines for our two older cases at the middle school are concluded by tomorrow. And, the 14 day, rolling calendar count for middle school will reset on Wednesday because 14 days have passed since those two older cases were in school. The 2 new cases this week also were not in school for 14 days as of this week.

However, it seems like we aren't being transparent about the cases if I don't report them to parents. And, I like to think that all of our students and staff "count" in our hearts, as we do have concern about everyone's health and welfare in the district. In summary, since last Monday, Nov. 30 until today, we received notification, as follows:

<b>Building</b>	<b># of new cases since 11/30 Staff or Students</b>
High School	6 (5 students, 1 staff) *the HS was closed, not in school
Middle School	2 (students) *not in school or out of the 14 day window
Bellefonte Elem	1 (staff) *not in school
Benner Elem	1 (staff) *not in school
Marion-Walker	3 (1 staff, 2 students) *not in school or out of the 14 day window
Pleasant Gap	0
BeLA	1 (status withheld for confidentiality) *not in school

Again, please note that none of these new cases "count" in the PDE rules because none of these staff members or students who tested positive were in any of our buildings (the high school was actually closed) in the past ten to 14 days (or more). Of the 8 cases in buildings, other than the high school, many of them have not been in any of our buildings since Nov. 23, and at least a few go back even farther. They were quarantining due to another family member and later developed symptoms or tested positive over this past week. This was an awesome way to not spread the disease. A special thank you to those who stayed home to keep all of us safe!

Late last night, we received notification that a staff member that traveled between two buildings last week tested positive. The building principals began contract tracing immediately and there were no students who were identified as close contacts to the staff member (no students need to quarantine). However, depending on the circumstances, this new case may count for

the PDE chart and the 14 day rolling calendar for each building the staff member was in. I'm intentionally not naming the buildings because that could compromise the confidentiality of the staff member. However, please know that no students were in close contact with this staff member.

### **Current Status of our Schools**

As explained, in terms of the PDE case counts, all six schools in the district have no known cases that count in the PDE chart requirements as of 7 PM last night. We will determine today if the new staff case that was identified late last night will count for one or more buildings. However, if it does, then it's only 1 case currently for the particular building in the 14 day, rolling calendar. For now, the high school, the middle school and all four elementary schools will continue with in-person learning until or if we reach the PDE thresholds for cases in each building or staffing becomes impossible (we still have shortages). Of course, any of this could change on a moment's notice. If so, I will send information as soon as I possibly can.

As a disclaimer, I'll continue to try to provide the most up-to-date information as I can, and we will continue to follow all of the PA DOH and PDE rules and requirements even as they can change rapidly. As I've said many times, the decisions about keeping our schools open as long as we can are never taken lightly. We don't want to spread the disease, and we really don't want students, staff or anyone to become sick with this virus, particularly with the current surge. On the other hand, we do want to keep our students in our schools because we know that's what is best for them academically, physically, socially and emotionally. Right now, we are taking this one day at time.

### **Moving forward**

Thus far, we haven't had any spread within our schools, and we will continue to mitigate any spread as best we can. We have faced this pandemic as one district and community united, and we have done an amazing job together. This is a testament to our safety protocols being strictly followed, and students and staff staying home when they are sick or have been a close contact to someone who tested positive. And, now with the holidays, parents are opting to have their children learn virtually this week and beyond, if they have concerns about potential exposure or travel or any concerns at all about the spread in our schools. Parents may choose remote/virtual learning for their students, now or at any time, for the remainder of the month, if they'd like (just send a note or email to your child's principal or attendance secretary). Thank you so very much for all of your patience, understanding, consideration and support!

In next week's letter, I will share information about our plans as we move into January. It's so hard to know what the world will be like in January. But, we need to start planning as much as we can.

Parents are encouraged to reach out to their child's principal with questions about quarantining, especially with the new DOH/CDC guidelines, or if they want to notify their principal about testing, symptoms or quarantining for their child. The principals are happy to assist in any way they can, and I'm also happy to help in any way I can. Don't hesitate to reach out to us.

Again, we encourage 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 and practicing personal responsibility. As part of the new DOH and PDE orders, we need to remind everyone and reinforce wearing masks properly with all, including our students. If parents can help with this, it is greatly appreciated! 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!

Best wishes for a safe and healthy week!

Sincerely,  
Tammie Burnaford  
Interim Superintendent  
Bellefonte Area School District