



**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

Nov. 23, 2020

Dear Bellefonte Area School District families, staff and community:

Happy Monday! And Happy Thanksgiving!

First, I'd like to share that we did not receive any notifications of any new, positive COVID cases since my letter on Friday. This means, as far as we know, we still have just the three active cases that I mentioned and described in my letter last Monday and in my letter on Friday. The quarantines and isolations of all three of the cases should be concluded later this week or early next week. As a side note, I want to apologize for any confusion or concern I caused for some of our high school parents in last Monday's letter. I write my Monday letters late Sunday night each week and set the system to send them at 8:00 every Monday morning. Last week, I wrote what I knew as of 11:00 Sunday evening. We got new information about the necessary contact tracing and quarantines very early Monday morning. So, the information in my letter had conflicting information and the timing was not good. I'm sorry.

At the local level, just like the rest of the state and across the country, there was a significant increase in the number of positive cases in the 16823 zip code last week, as compared to the previous reporting period. The number of new positive cases in the 16823 (+161) and in 16841 (+8) zip codes skyrocketed last week, as anticipated. As a reminder, our two main zip codes also span two other school districts, and it's very hard to tell where these cases are in our community. I've mentioned a few times that we do know there are outbreaks in several establishments, including the long-term care facilities and the prisons, within the 16823 zip code. As an example, last week, I shared that the number of positive cases at Centre Crest was surging. According to the Centre Crest website this week, there are now 134 active, positive cases at Centre Crest (94 residents, 40 staff members). Many of the cases we've had in our schools over the past seven weeks are somehow linked to the outbreaks in long-term care facilities, prisons, or

other organizations. Most importantly, we still have no known transmission **within** the schools. 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.

The surge in new positive COVID cases is occurring across the nation, our state and our county. Pennsylvania reported a record number of new positive cases every day during the last reporting period. In terms of the county-level data, the number of positive cases in Centre County rose during this reporting period. While Centre County is no longer leading the state in positive cases per 100,000, again this week nearly all of the counties in Pennsylvania, including Centre County, will be designated as having a “substantial rate of community transmission.” Interestingly, the positivity rate for Centre County (6.4%) over this reporting period is lower than most other PA counties.

Last week, Dr. Levine of the PA Department of Health (DOH) issued new mandates to curb the spread of the virus, including expanded mask requirements and travel requirements. For us, we already were wearing masks in our schools nearly all of the time. The only significant change to masks for us is that now masks also must be worn during intense, physical activity, including physical education classes and competitions. We were following all of the DOH directives and will continue to do so. The DOH updated the Mask Frequently Asked Questions page on Friday, Nov. 20, 2020. This page includes clarification and more information about masks, in general, too. The page can be accessed here:

<https://www.health.pa.gov/topics/disease/coronavirus/Pages/Guidance/Universal-Masking-FAQ.aspx>

Dr. Levine also issued travel requirements last week. Specific information about student travel was, or will be sent to parents/guardians by the building principals. Here is a short summary of the information from the DoH website:

- The Secretary of Health issued an order requiring anyone who visits from another state to have a **negative COVID-19 test within 72 hours prior to entering** the commonwealth. If someone cannot get a test or chooses not to, they must **quarantine for 14 days** upon arrival in Pennsylvania.
- Pennsylvanians visiting other states are required to have a **negative COVID-19 test within 72 hours prior to their return** to the commonwealth, or to **quarantine for 14 days** upon return to Pennsylvania. This does NOT apply to people who commute to and from another state for work or for medical treatment.

The DOH travel requirements will apply to all students and staff members in our district. More information for travelers can be found on the DOH website:

<https://www.health.pa.gov/topics/disease/coronavirus/Pages/Travelers.aspx>

Yesterday, the Centre Daily Times reported that the Bellefonte Area School District has “no plans” to teach virtually. This is not completely accurate or could be misunderstood. Within the parameters given in Friday’s letter, we hope to continue to provide an in-person education for our students as long as we can. As stated in Friday’s letter, our status could change at a moment’s notice if we have a significant rise in cases and/or quarantines within our schools, or we do not have enough staff members to provide an in-person education in our schools, or another government entity (the Governor, the PA Department of Health, the PA Department of Education, etc.) tells us that we are required to move to a full, remote teaching/learning model. I’d also like to note that in the event we must move to a virtual teaching/learning model, we are very prepared to do so. Our administrators, teachers, and staff have planned every detail possible so that we can continue the best education possible for our students. But for now, we are planning to stay the course in our in-person model for all of the reasons recently discussed. Our plan is to be in school today and tomorrow and to return to teaching/learning on Dec. 1, in person. Of course, changes can come rapidly, and we may need to change our plans at a moment’s notice. If any of this latest information changes or our status must change, we will let you know as soon as possible.

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. 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, even if the number of new cases rises in our zip code, county and state.

On a personal note, I am so grateful that I am part of this awesome school community and I can serve the students, parents, families and community. I am so truly blessed. Thank you.

I would like to wish you and your family a safe and very wonderful Thanksgiving!

Sincerely,

Tammie Burnaford
Interim Superintendent
Bellefonte Area School District