



**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. 16, 2020

Dear Bellefonte Area School District families, staff and community:

Happy Monday! The weather is certainly different today than it was last Monday. It's hard to believe that it's only 10 days until Thanksgiving and 45 days until we ring in a new year. Time is flying!

As usual, first I'd like to share some information about some positive COVID-19 cases that were identified in our school district in the past week and late last night. By the end of last week, we received notification that there were two new positive cases involving two of our students. In both of these unrelated cases (a middle school student and a high school student), the students were already quarantined because they had been in close contact with a **family member** who tested positive. These students haven't been in our schools for several weeks. No contact tracing in our schools needed to occur for these two cases, and the isolations and quarantines for these students and their own families may conclude within the week. Some school districts do not report these types of cases because they occur far removed from the schools. However, in full disclosure, we will continue to provide information about all **known** cases we have. Then, late last night, two different parents notified us that a middle school student tested positive and a high school student tested positive this weekend. These cases are also unrelated. Both students were not in school most of the week last week, but the building principals and administrators worked to do the minimal amount of contact tracing that needed to be done late into the night last night. Principals contacted any students or staff members that may have been in close contact with the two new cases. We will follow up with the Department of Health (DOH) this morning. In short, this means we have a total of four known, unrelated active cases in the district -- two middle school students and two high school students, although two of the students have not been in our schools for several weeks.

Perhaps, 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. In some ways, our schools seem to be a safer place for our students and staff.

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. In the past seven day, the PA Department of Health (DOH) reporting period (Friday, Nov. 6 - Thursday, Nov. 12), the number of new positive cases in the 16823 zip code climbed to 61. There were seven new cases in the 16841 zip code. The surge and trend in rising numbers also seems likely for the next reporting period. Since Friday, there have been 60 new cases (47 on Friday and 13 on Saturday) in the 16823 zip code alone. 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. Specifically, as an example, Centre Crest, a long-term care facility located in the 16823 zip code, posted a notification letter on the Centre Crest website yesterday that indicates there are currently 68 active confirmed cases among residents and 25 active confirmed cases among staff members at Centre Crest. Yesterday, The Centre Daily Times also published an article about the huge surge of positive cases in long term care facilities in Centre County over the past week and month. Again, the Department of Health (DOH) doesn't give us exact data or information about the location of cases or how the new cases are reflected in daily/weekly counts, so we can only guess about how the numbers align with community spread and the potential impact in our schools.

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 or positivity rate, at least 60 of the 67 counties in Pennsylvania, including Centre County, will be designated as having a "substantial rate of community transmission" over the past week. As mentioned, on the national level, there seems to be more testing and the surge in positive cases continues to grow. The number of positive cases and the number of tests hit record numbers in the state over the past week, as well.

We continue to follow all news reports and read as much credible, factual information about the spread of the coronavirus, as we can, and talk with and learn from other school districts. With the surge in positive cases across the state, there have been many school districts that have decided to move to a full virtual instructional model. These districts have shifted to full remote instruction for at least a few different reasons. There seems to be a mounting pressure to change models across the state and nation, as some states are shutting down schools.

Interestingly, I just saw an intriguing story on NBC news last night that indicated that schools in Europe are staying open even when all other businesses shut down. The report suggested that some European countries and areas feel their schools are safe zones and an in-person education for students is crucial. Locally, I'd also like to share that I do participate in discussions with the other superintendents in Centre, Clearfield and Clinton Counties through our Intermediate Unit and within our own county. On Thursday, I met via zoom with the superintendents of State College, Penns Valley and Bald Eagle Area. We shared our case counts and discussed ideas and options to continue to keep our students, staff and communities safe -- particularly as positive case numbers rise and the holidays approaching. As I said in one of my first parent letters, our focus at Bellefonte will be to continue to do what's best for our BASD students, staff, parents, families and communities. As always, we continue to closely and diligently monitor the data and our schools.

We ask that parents/guardians consider contingency plans for their children in the event we may need to close one or more schools for a period of time. However, as of this writing, we are not planning to move to full remote learning in any of our schools yet or at this time. 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.

And, once again, thank you so much for all you do!

Sincerely,
Tammie Burnaford
Interim Superintendent
Bellefonte Area School District