



**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. 2, 2020

Dear Bellefonte Area School District families, staff and community:

Happy Monday! This past weekend brought us a full moon, Halloween and a time change, and now we are heading into our next-to-last month of 2020. What exciting times we are living in! We have a lot of information to share this week.

First, I'd like to share some information about some positive cases that were identified in our school district over the past week. Last week, we received confirmation that a high school staff member tested positive for the coronavirus. For this case, we were given conflicting information from the PA Department of Health, at first, but the DOH later took responsibility for the minor error and slight confusion. The staff member wasn't in school, so very little contract tracing needed to occur, and there were only a few persons who needed to quarantine for a short period of time. For the second case, we were notified this weekend that a student at Pleasant Gap Elementary School tested positive. However, the student had not been in school most of last week, and all safety protocols were strictly followed at the school. As a result, there were no close contacts in the school or district, and no students or staff are quarantined for this case. And, in full disclosure, there was another district employee who tested positive last week, but that employee has been and is currently on a leave of absence for many weeks and not in any of our schools.

This week has reminded us how important it is for students and staff to stay at home if they are not feeling well or if they have been exposed to a person who tested positive for coronavirus. We also were reminded how our vigilance in our safety protocols has kept our staff and students safe when they are at school. Wearing masks, practicing social distancing, washing hands, and extensively cleaning and sanitizing surfaces is working. Now more than ever, we need to keep up these safe practices, and each one of us needs to continue to take personal

responsibility. A big shoutout and thank you to parents and families for keeping students home and for supporting all of our safe practices! In our communication with the DOH this week, our district was commended a few times by the DOH for our immediate responses and all we are doing to keep our students, staff, parents, families and communities safe. Our administrators, teachers and staff are working their hardest to keep our students safe and healthy. The DOH noticed and praised our school families and our district!

As a reminder, last week, I shared that we know that it seems like we have had several cases in the district. However, as we track cases, we must keep in mind the time frames of those cases. The DOH considers the number of active cases over a 14 day period. For us, our earlier cases have “recovered” and quarantines have ended. So, we currently have three active cases in the district (a student and a staff member at the high school, the PGE elementary student). The quarantines for the two high school cases will end this week. I must repeat, too, that we have not had any known transmissions of the virus between our own student and staff populations. The virus has made its way into our schools from outside organizations to this point in time.

With all of this being said, there was a significant increase in the number of positive cases in the 16823 zip code over the past week. In the past seven day, DOH, reporting period (Friday, Oct. 23 - Thursday, Oct. 29), the number of new positive cases in the 16823 zip code rose to 39, and there were three new cases in the 16841 zip code. As a reminder, these two zip codes also span two other school districts, and it’s very hard to tell where these cases are in our community. But, we do know that there is a significant outbreak in nursing and personal care homes in our area, and we have been told there has been an outbreak in the prisons and other local establishments or businesses. Nevertheless, we have had more cases in our zip codes during this reporting period than any other time.

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, there are now at least 26 other counties in Pennsylvania that will be determined to have a “substantial rate of community transmission.” On a state and national level, there seems to be more testing and a surge in positive cases in recent days and weeks, as well.

As the local, state and national positive cases are rising, we will continue to closely monitor the data and our schools. We will keep our schools open as long as we can safely do so. We asked 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.

On a personal note, I just want to share that the decisions about our schools, our staff, our students, and our families are very difficult in these times. If the virus begins to spread within our schools, the physical safety and health of our students, staff, parents, families and community could be in jeopardy. We don't want to spread the disease, and we really don't want anyone to become sick with this virus. 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. We know that there are grave concerns for our students who have shown or will show signs of depression and anxiety, students and families who may have food or shelter concerns, or students who may not have adult support for virtual education at home, etc., if we close schools. We know parents need to work to support their families; we know some of our parents and families worry constantly about what school closure may mean for them. Please know our decisions are never easy and are not ever taken lightly. There is a great deal of stress in every aspect of our lives today. I'd like to express my heartfelt gratitude for your support, patience and understanding as we work together in these most difficult and stressful times.

Finally, I would like to share some very good news. In September, we were notified that the USDA would provide free breakfast and free lunch to all of our schools until the end of December. I am pleased to announce that the USDA has extended the free breakfast and free lunch programs through the end of the school year in June 2021. There really is such a thing as a free lunch in the BASD -- at least for this entire school year!

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. 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