



Bellefonte Area
School District

Bellefonte Area School District

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Inspiring and Preparing Today's Learners to Embrace Tomorrow's Challenges

Dear Bellefonte Area School District Families:

Happy September!

If you recall in the letter that I sent on Aug. 21, I shared that there are two reasons we would change our instructional model. One of those reasons involves the **county** community transmission rate. If the rate reaches the "substantial" level using the metrics provided by the PA Dept. of Health, then the PA Dept. of Education (PDE) and the PA Dept of Health (PA DOH) will meet with all of the county superintendents to develop a plan of action, which could include remaining in our current Blended Learning Instructional model or moving to a full remote learning model. More information and details about the designations can be found on the PDE or PA DOH websites.

As you may know, the number of positive cases in Centre County rose sharply in the past week. So, Friday, when the weekly numbers were released for Centre County, it was not surprising that the numbers are significantly higher at the end of this week as compared to other weeks. Extensive testing is being conducted with students at Penn State. Nearly all of the new cases have been in the University Park or State College areas. There have been very few new cases in the 16823 or 16841 zip codes over the past seven days. These two zip codes are the main two zip codes for our communities and even these zip codes stretch from our district into two other school districts. The data is not broken down by municipality, but it is evident that we have not had a significant increase in new cases within our Bellefonte area communities over the past seven days or prior. As of today, we have no known positive COVID cases with our students or staff **in** our schools or facilities. Nevertheless, this afternoon, **Centre County** was designated as having a "substantial" rate of transmission by the PA DOH, and the required superintendent meeting with PDE/PA DOH occurred late this morning.

During this meeting, Matt Stem from PDE indicated that the intentions of PDE and the PA DOH are to share data and information with school districts, provide support and make recommendations for school districts. He also noted:

- PDE recommends a district not move to other instructional models (ex: full remote learning) until 2 weeks of data has been analyzed. We've only had 1 week with a "substantial" designation.
- Ultimately school districts can decide what instructional model is best for their districts even if the county receives the "substantial" designation for 2 or more weeks
- The PA DOH will provide guidance and support if an outbreak occurs within a school or district

Dr. O'Donnell, the superintendent in the State College Area School District, and his team decided on Friday that State College Area SD would move to a fully-remote instructional model immediately until further notice. In his letter to the State College parents, he indicated that the other county school districts should do the same. This is contrary to the information we received this morning. However, quite simply, in our district, we will await direction from PDE/PA DOH, and we will continue to focus on our own Bellefonte Area SD community, students, parents, families and staff.

After speaking with many stakeholders in our district, parents, neighboring school district superintendents and others over the past few days, we are planning to stay the course in our Bellefonte Area School District with our current Blended Learning model until we hear differently from PDE/PA DOH or we have an outbreak in our Bellefonte communities or schools. We are not planning to move to full remote learning at this time. We will continue to closely monitor the data and our schools. Of course, changes can come rapidly and are sometimes out of our control. If any of this latest information changes or our status must change, I will let you know as soon as possible.

Once again, thank you so very much for all you have done to support us, to help us and to work with us in the best interest of our students during these most challenging times. Aside from all of the stress, I feel so blessed to be surrounded by such amazing people, parents, staff and students in our own Bellefonte Area communities!

Hope you have a wonderful week!

Tammie Burnaford
Interim Superintendent
Bellefonte Area School District

