



**Bellefonte Area  
School District**

## **Bellefonte Area School District**

**318 North Allegheny Street  
Bellefonte, PA 16823  
Telephone: (814) 355-4814**

**Mrs. Tammie L. Burnaford, Interim Superintendent  
Mr. Kenneth G. Bean, Jr., CMA, Director of Fiscal Affairs**

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

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**Dec. 13, 2020**

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

I know this letter is a bit early, but I wanted to share our most recent change in the status of one of our schools, as soon as I could. Since my letter on Friday, we received notification of a number of new cases in the district. As required by the new PDE mandates, the increase in case count at Marion-Walker Elementary School means we must move to remote learning in that particular school for three days.

### **Changes in Status for Marion-Walker Elementary School**

We received notification of 3 new, positive cases at Marion-Walker Elementary School over the past 2 days, and there is at least one other, anticipated 4th case (test results are pending). Marion-Walker is deemed a "small school" (less than 500 students), and with 2-4 cases in a 14 day window, should be closed for 3-7 days according to the PDE mandates (see the letter I sent on Friday or the PDE website for more information about this). Therefore, we are planning to close Marion-Walker Elementary School and move to remote learning in that elementary school tomorrow, Dec. 14 through Wednesday, Dec. 16. This announcement was sent via phone message to all Marion-Walker parents and staff late this afternoon by Mrs. Krisch. Additionally, Mrs. Krisch completed all contract tracing and parents of students who were identified as close contacts of the new, confirmed cases were contacted earlier today. If there are other new cases, Mrs. Krisch will follow through with any other contact tracing, notifications that need to occur. We know this is not ideal for our students and can create hardships for parents, but it's being done out of an abundance of caution, as a means to keep our students and staff safe, and with a desire to have students in school as much as possible.

### Other New Cases in the District

In addition, today we received notifications of 3 new, positive cases at the Middle School, but these three cases are all related to each other and evolved in the same family. Mrs. Garman and Mr. Baughman contacted the parents of students who may have been close contacts with these 3 cases earlier today.

And, there's one more known, positive case, a student at the High School. This student has not been in school since Monday, so there was very minimal contact tracing to be completed. Mrs. Michaels contacted the parents of just a few students who may have been close contacts with this new case.

### Summary of New Positive Cases by Building since Friday

Following what I explained in Friday's letter and since Friday, here is a summary of new, known cases by building, as of 6:00 PM tonight:

<b>Building</b>	<b>Total number of known, new cases since 12/7</b>	<b>*Number of cases that now "count" - students/staff that have been physically present in the building while infectious</b>
High School	1 (student)	1
Middle School	3 (all related to each other, details omitted for confidentiality)	3
Bellefonte Elem.	0	0
Benner Elem.	0	0
Marion-Walker	3 (2 students, 1 staff), results pending for at least 1 more student	3
Pleasant Gap	0	0
BeLA	0	0

Active cases move in and out of the 14 day window based on the date of symptom onset or a positive case. This chart shows the new cases since Friday, and the number of new cases

since Friday that “count.” I’d like to note that some of these cases are within the same families. Also, as a reminder, of course, parents have been and will be notified if their children have been identified as a close contact as soon as possible after a new case is identified, just as we have been doing. And, it bears repeating that all areas of our buildings and transportation (buses and vans), are thoroughly cleaned and disinfected daily. Finally, as a side note, case counts reset to 0 after a closure.

### **Reminder: Entire District going to fully remote learning on Dec. 21 and 22**

As explained in Friday’s letter, after much thought, deliberation, consideration and discussion, we are going to go to remote learning in all of our BASD buildings on Dec. 21 and 22. If we close and move to remote learning on those 2 days in all BASD schools, barring any complications from the Governor, PDE or the PA DOH or unforeseen circumstances, we can confidently return to school, full time on Jan. 4. I know this may create hardship for parents on those 2 days, and I’m truly sorry. But, in the long run, we have great hopes that we will be able to get our students back in our schools more quickly in January and resume the very successful and safe practices that we have accomplished together thus far, so that we can provide the best educational environment while keeping our students and staff healthy.

### **A Word about Remote, Virtual Learning**

While remote learning can be very difficult for some students, I’d like to provide a few suggestions that I’ve heard from parents and through educational organizations. The most common suggestion is to have a defined area where the student “does school” -- maybe a designated area at a table, or at a desk or just a designated space for “school.” This seems to help with distractions for some students and helps with focus. Along the same lines, another suggestion is to make sure what is in the view of the camera on the student’s chromebook in the home setting during the live, virtual lesson. There are stories on social media of persons who are caught on camera, persons who may or may not have wanted to be part of the live lesson. In addition, the teachers have been working in Google Classroom with all of their students since August. Students, even our youngest learners, should be able to login to Google Classroom without parental support. However, there is parent information about Google Classroom at this link:

<https://sites.google.com/basd.net/closing-resources/home?authuser=0>

Students who are having trouble with chromebooks or technology, can seek support by sending and email to this link: [chromebooksupport@basd.net](mailto:chromebooksupport@basd.net)

Any parental encouragement for their children to stay engaged in the learning, based on their student's schedule and participation in the remote learning is greatly appreciated. These are just some suggestions that I have recently encountered.

### **And in January...**

I also mentioned some plans for January in Friday's letter. As we did during the Thanksgiving holiday and over the past few weeks, after this winter and holiday break, parents may choose to voluntarily quarantine their students if they have any concerns that they could have been exposed to the disease in any way over this holiday period. In addition, parents who have concerns about their students returning to school with the rising number of cases or are feeling uncomfortable with the return may also voluntarily quarantine their children or just continue the voluntary quarantine into the first few weeks of January. Students will be able to log in to their own classes, follow their own schedules and connect with their teachers virtually. If parents choose to quarantine or continue to quarantine their children instead of returning to school on Jan. 4, they simply need to send a note to their child's school indicating that they will be quarantining or continuing quarantining and learning virtually.

Looking ahead, we will be asking parents to re-select the learning option for their students for the second semester which begins on Jan. 19. We will be sending a lot more information about this re-selection next week and during the first week of January. Mrs. Garman and Mrs. Krisch will be sharing a video this week describing the options for the second semester. In short, there will be four options as we start the second semester. We will have the same three we had the first semester - full time in person 5 days, hybrid (2 days in, 3 days remote), and BeLA. But, we will be adding a full time virtual option where students will be learning virtually through our own teachers and classes, much like some have been doing during the recent quarantines and past few weeks. We won't ask parents to choose their option until we come back in January, so that all of us have a better understanding of the spread of the virus and any impact of the new vaccine distribution. We just wanted to give parents a heads up now.

### **To Recap**

Here is our current status in the Bellefonte Area School District:

- The Middle School will be in remote learning on Dec. 14 and 15 and will reopen for in-person learning on Dec. 16.

- Marion-Walker Elementary School will be in remote learning on Dec. 14, 15 and 16 and will open for in-person learning on Dec. 17.
- Barring any surge in cases in the schools, the High School, Bellefonte Elementary, Benner Elementary and Pleasant Gap Elementary will stay the course this week, Dec. 14-18 and will be open for in-person learning all week.
- The entire district will move to remote learning on Dec. 21 and 22. But, our plan is to return to teaching and learning, as we have been doing, on Jan. 4, in person or remotely for those students who are quarantining.

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. Although this letter replaces my usual, Monday morning letter, I may send a midweek update if needed. If not, I'll send a note on Friday and then my usual letter next Monday, just to provide as much information as I can.

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, social distancing 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.

Sincerely,  
Tammie Burnaford  
Interim Superintendent  
Bellefonte Area School District