



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

Aug. 24, 2020

Dear Bellefonte Area School District Families:

Welcome Back! We have missed all of our students, parents and families tremendously during the past five months. We are very excited to kick off the 2020-21 school year tomorrow, Tuesday, Aug. 25, 2020. We are very appreciative of all of the support we've gotten from our BASD families this summer, particularly through the frequent changes and recommendations issued by the PA Department of Health (PA DOH) and the PA Department of Education (PDE). During the past few weeks and months, we have sent a lot of information to parents and families in preparation for this school year. Our district teams continue to work diligently to provide the safest and best educational opportunities we can for our students.

There were three learning options for our students, and information for each model is included in this letter. Although the numbers continue to fluctuate slightly, the percentage of students in each option remains fairly steady. At this time, about 73.4% of our students will be attending school in person, full time; about 10.1% chose the hybrid model; and about 16.5% chose Bellefonte eLearning Academy (BeLA). The next section includes information that applies to students who will be attending in person, either full time or part time (hybrid). After that section, information is provided for parents of BeLA students.

Information for parents/guardians of students who will be attending school in person, including students who will be attending full time and those who will be attending in the hybrid model:

1. Transportation: Many parents indicated that they are willing to transport their children to and/or from school each day. This is wonderful and will help with social distancing on our buses. However, the additional traffic may cause more congestion for dropoff and

pickup at each school. Even in typical years, it takes us a week or two to work out the normal bus schedules. Of course, safety is paramount during the transition times. We ask that parents are patient and understanding as we work out all of the kinks with traffic and transportation for the first day and weeks of school.

2. Masks: Per PA DOH order and our board-approved BASD health and safety plan, masks must be worn by all students and staff while inside the buildings. There are some allowable exemptions for students and staff. We ask parents to provide a mask for their child(ren), but we do have free masks available in each school, if a student needs one. More information about masks can be obtained from the PDE:
<https://www.education.pa.gov/Schools/safeschools/emergencyplanning/COVID-19/SchoolReopeningGuidance/ReopeningPreKto12/PublicHealthGuidance/Pages/default.aspx#face>
3. Parents of students who will be attending school in the hybrid model should have received information from your child's principal regarding which days your child(ren) should attend. Students will either attend school on Monday and Thursday OR Tuesday and Friday. The students selected for Tuesday/Friday will begin on Tuesday, Aug. 25, and the students selected for Monday/Thursday will have their first in-person school day on Thursday, Aug. 27. Building principals also sent information to parents/families regarding Chromebook pickups for the students who are attending Monday/Thursday. Students attending on Tuesday/Friday will get their Chromebooks and instructions on their first day, Tuesday, Aug. 25. If you need more information, please reach out to your child's principal.
4. There are two ways that in-person instruction for students may change in the coming days or weeks -- a necessary change in instructional model due to an increase in the rate of community transmission OR an outbreak within a class, school or the district. Each situation is explained below:
 - a. Rate of Community Transmission Spread Rates: If rates increase significantly in Centre County, we may need to move to our next phase, as described in our BASD health and safety plan. Last week, PDE and the PA DOH issued new guidance for selecting an instructional model. If you would like to read this guidance, you may find it here:
<https://www.education.pa.gov/Schools/safeschools/emergencyplanning/COVID-19/SchoolReopeningGuidance/ReopeningPreKto12/Pages/DeterminingInstructionalModels.aspx>. It's important to note that we have elected to not have a full, in-person model event at this point. Our instructional model is already "blended." We have full in-person model for *some* students, but we are also offering a hybrid (staggered student attendance in school), and a

full virtual option (i.e. BeLA). At this time, this blended model may be appropriate for both a low transmission rate or a moderate transmission rate. However, we also have a more stringent blended model available within our health and safety plan. In this model, no students would attend school full time. All students would attend according to the hybrid model, attending either Monday/Thursday OR Tuesday/Friday.

- b. Class, School or District Outbreak: Last week, PDE and the PA DOH issued new guidance and recommendations for schools following the identification of a case or cases of COVID-19. This guidance answers many of the questions we have been asked recently. The Department of Health will be responsible for contact tracing, notifying individuals who had close contact, etc. This latest guidance provides a metric for determining when classes or schools may need to quarantine, alter instructional approaches or close schools. More information can be found at this link:

<https://www.education.pa.gov/Schools/safeschools/emergencyplanning/COVID-19/SchoolReopeningGuidance/ReopeningPreKto12/PublicHealthGuidance/Pages/SchoolClosureRecommendations.aspx>. We have been asked,

“How will we know if there’s a positive case in our child’s class or school?” by many parents. We have been told that the PA DOH will be doing all of the necessary notifications to parents if a case or outbreak occurs. Due to confidentiality and health privacy laws, as a district, we won’t be able to provide specific information to parents/guardians about student/staff health concerns. A general, district letter may be sent to parents/guardians, but the PA DOH will be responsible for all contacts and contact tracing.

- c. If the rate of community transmission rises substantially or there is a significant outbreak that requires extended closures, we will follow state guidelines and may move to a complete virtual instructional model. If this occurs, no students will attend in-person, and all teaching and learning activities will occur remotely. Also, please note, that if or when we change our instructional model to a complete virtual model, the educational program will not be similar to the Continuity of Education plan that we were required to adhere to in the spring. Now, the new instructional model that we may transition to requires teachers to teach daily lessons in a virtual classroom setting and students will engage in those activities.
- d. If we transition to another instructional model, we will try to give parents/guardians as much notice as possible.

- e. Due to the uncertainty of the future, parents/guardians are strongly encouraged to have contingency plans in place for your child's care in case we must change our instructional model.

Information for parents/guardians of students who will be participating in Bellefonte eLearning Academy (BeLA):

1. We have about 400 students enrolled in BeLA to start the school year. In order to serve our BeLA students in the best way possible, we have divided BeLA into two levels -- an elementary program for students in kindergarten through fifth grades and a secondary model for students in grades 6-12. Each level has its own principal of record, BeLA coordinator and supporting teachers. Some information was sent to parents at both levels, and there will be more sent home this week.
2. For more immediate information, parents may contact Duffy Besch (dbesch@basd.net) or Anita Caruso (acaruso@basd.net) at the elementary level. Parents may contact Sommer Garman (sgarman@basd.net) or Rebecca Leitzell (rleitzel@basd.net) at the secondary level.

More information:

We realize that there is a lot of information that parents/guardians will need as we reopen our schools, and we know that PDE and the PA DOH mandates and changes can occur rapidly. We strive to keep our parents/guardians as informed as possible. Our district website (www.basd.net) includes COVID-19 and reopening-schools information for parents/guardians. Our BASD board-approved and PDE-mandated health and safety plan can be found on the district website, as well:

(<https://www.basd.net/cms/lib/PA01001269/Centricity/Domain/1/return%20to%20school%20health%20and%20safety.pdf>). The plan includes more specific details about nearly every aspect of reopening our schools in these times. Additionally, all parents/guardians are encouraged to reach out to their child's principals and teachers with questions and concerns or to seek more specific information. We appreciate your patience, support and willingness to work with us now and throughout the past five months. Thank you so very much! We have truly missed our students, and we can't wait until we are together again!

Sincerely,

Tammie Burnaford
Interim Superintendent
Bellefonte Area School District

