



**Bellefonte Area
School District**

Bellefonte Area School District

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

Jan. 18, 2021

Dear Bellefonte Area School District families, staff and community:

Happy MLK day! My update is short with only two major topics today. I'll provide another update on Friday (or sooner if really needed).

BASD Case Count Update

Since my letter and report on Friday, Jan. 15, we were notified of only 1 new, positive case in the district. Yesterday we received notification that a middle school student tested positive for Covid19. Mr. Baughman and Mrs. Garman completed the contact tracing for the DoH today, and parents of students who may have been a close contact were notified. The student was physically present in the school while infectious, so the case does count according to PDE mandates.

Just to refresh your memory, per the PA Department of Education (PDE) mandates, we must keep track of the number of active cases in each district school based on a 14 day rolling calendar. Cases count in the rolling 14 day calendar only if the student/staff member was physically present in the building while infectious. Active cases move in and out of the 14 day window based on the date of symptom onset or a positive case. The case counts and surrounding circumstances are discussed with the PA Department of Health (DoH) after each new case is identified, and we are given recommendations about possible closures, if needed. This is our current summary since Friday for each school in the district:

Building	Total number of known, new cases since 1/15	*Number of cases that now “count” - students/staff that have been physically present in the building while infectious
High School	0	0
Middle School	1	1
Bellefonte Elem.	0	0
Benner Elem.	0	0
Marion-Walker Elem.	0	0
Pleasant Gap Elem.	0	0
BeLA	0	0

Learning Options for the Second Semester Begin Tomorrow

As a reminder, the second Semester begins tomorrow which means we will be returning to the chosen learning options for all students tomorrow. The past two months have been awesome in our working together to try to keep students and staff safe while providing the best education possible for each and every student. I know there have been some questions regarding why we are limiting flexibility and asking parents and students to choose and stick with one option, as much as possible. I'd like to explain our thinking....

For the past 2 months, we have worked with parents to make our schools safer and to allow the flexibility of choosing what is best for their children, even if it meant that the student changed his/her learning option frequently. We did not have a "full time, remote learning" option, so our teachers tried to do the best they could. On most days, with the fluctuation of options, teachers did not know who would be in front of them and who would be at home or in a remote learning environment. This made it very difficult for teachers to plan and to reach every student because the delivery for some students changed almost daily. On some days, parents

were contacting the secretary, teacher or building principal in the morning because they wanted their children to learn remotely for that single day. If the message got to the teacher in the early morning, teachers were scrambling to connect with the remote learners. More than a few times, the teachers did not get a notice until after school began, so they missed connecting with the new remote learners until later in the day. When they did receive a notice the morning of or a late notice, they had to spend time connecting with a remote learner at the last minute which in turn impacted the whole class. All of these daily changes for individual students and the confusion that was created on some days have taken a great toll on our teachers who want to provide the very best education for each and every student. They understand why we needed and allowed the flexibility over the past 2 months, but they have been incredibly overwhelmed and stressed trying to keep all students safe and trying to provide the best education possible for each and every student.

It was our hope that providing a 4th option (full time remote learning) would provide some flexibility for parents, but it would also help teachers develop some consistency in teaching 2 groups of students at once, those in front of them and those in a remote setting, and it would help teachers in knowing who those students are in each group each day. We know that things can change with students who must quarantine, and those students still may need to do remote learning for the quarantine period. Teachers can plan for those students and those days. But, constant changes on a daily basis have just been too difficult for teachers to manage, and the rest of the class instruction has been and can be impeded.

Please don't misunderstand, we are so incredibly appreciative that parents did keep their students home when in doubt over the past 2 months, and we know that the reason why we have been so successful in keeping our schools open is due to the support of parents and students. Parents still should keep their students home when they have symptoms or may have been exposed to the virus, as we have done. It's Ok to keep students home and ask for remote connections for a period of time. We are simply asking that parents and students are constantly changing their learning option on a daily basis.

With all of this said, we've learned many things in the last 10 months. First, anything can change at a moment's notice. We need to be flexible to the changing circumstances. I don't know what the status of the coronavirus disease or the schools might be in the next few weeks or months. We can take only one day at a time. But, we always keep the door open for change and flexibility to continue our mission of first keeping our students and staff safe and secondly providing the best education we possibly can. Secondly, we have been an amazing team and school community together. We would not be where we are today without the support of students, parents and families. We cannot forget how special this has been for our students, even in the very difficult and challenging times, and how we must continue to build for them.

Other Reminders

Parents should continue to notify building principals if their child(ren) tests positive for the coronavirus. The best way to get in touch with the building principal on the weekends or off times is via email, as our principals check email regularly even during the evening hours and on weekends. The quick notifications really have helped our administrators to act quickly to begin contact tracing and to lessen the spread of the disease.

Of course, the PDE mandates, the DoH directives, increases in new cases or unforeseen issues can happen 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. Unless we have any major news, outbreaks or changes that need to be shared immediately, I will send an update letter with case counts and other information on Friday, again this week.

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.

I hope you and your family stays safe, healthy and well! Best wishes for a fabulous week ahead!

Sincerely,
Tammie Burnaford
Interim Superintendent
Bellefonte Area School District