



**Bellefonte Area
School District**

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

Oct. 19, 2020

Dear Bellefonte Area School District Families, Staff and Community:

Happy Monday! We are nearing the end of the first marking period already! Time is flying!

The most troublesome sentences that may be shared lately begin with the words, “I heard....” Sentences that start with “I heard....” may or may not contain accurate information about our schools. For this reason, we will continue to provide the most up-to-date and accurate information we can without crossing any boundaries of confidentiality. In that spirit, I want to provide regular information about the positive coronavirus cases in our district, the Department of Health guidance, our process and our plans, as well as our usual updates.

First, I’d like to share some information about another positive case that was identified in our school district. Late yesterday, we received notice that an elementary student tested positive for the coronavirus. We are working again with the Department of Health (DOH) in our plans and will follow the Dept. of Health recommendations. The elementary school principal already identified and contacted staff members and parents of students who may have been in close contact with this case by last evening. The DOH will also reach out to those individuals and will provide further guidance.

As a quick reminder, it is important to understand what happens when a positive case is identified and how contact tracing occurs. The PA Department of Health’s rule and definition for “close contact” is when one person is less than 6 feet from another person, who has tested positive, for more than 15 continuous minutes. Those individuals will be quarantined for 14

days according to the Dept. of Health. A contact of a contact (a secondary contact) is not the same as a close contact and only will need to take the usual precautions (mask, hand washing, social distancing, stay home when sick, aware of any symptoms, etc.), but will not need to quarantine unless symptoms do arise or personally receiving a positive test result . More helpful information can be found on the PDE and PA DOH websites.

Next, let's do the usual Centre County and local data review. This week's update for Centre County shows that the number of cases in the county are again lower. Centre County is no longer leading the state in positive cases per 100,000 or positivity rate. In our local area, our case count has risen, particularly in the 16823 zip code. During this latest reporting period (Friday, Oct. 9 - Thursday, Oct. 16), there were 24 new positive cases attributed to the 16823 zip code. There were no new cases in 16841, but one previously reported positive case was actually removed. This means there have not been any new cases in the 16841 zip code for 30 straight days. As a reminder, the data is listed by total zip code and not broken down by specific municipalities or actual location within the zip code. But, during our calls with our Department of Health nurse, we learned that there have been significant outbreaks in establishments, places of employment and/or businesses in the 16823 zip code.

Currently, the outbreaks in those local and community places are trickling into our schools, but we have not had any known transmissions of the virus between our own student and staff populations. The virus has made its way in from the outside organizations. Our students and staff have been and are very vigilant in following all of the safety protocols we have in place (masks, social distancing, hand washing, etc.). And, parents have been supportive in keeping their students home when they are sick and reporting their concerns to the building principals as soon as possible. These practices have kept the virus from spreading within the schools to this date. We need to keep up the great work in order to keep our students and staff safe and healthy. This also means that we are not planning to move to full remote learning in any of our schools yet or 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, we will let you know as soon as possible. We will provide regular updates and information to the extent possible, so that "I heard" statements are the most accurate possible.

The coronavirus creates many challenges and concerns in every aspect of our lives today. We know that each of us may have different levels of concern, and each of us have different personal circumstances and viewpoints. Now, more than ever, we need to pull together as one, supportive community. 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. Working together is crucial, but what a wonderful community we have!

After the brief emergency evacuation of Bellefonte on Friday, I joked that I should write a book about my experiences. I know it will be a great book because it will be about the awesome students, staff, parents and families we have in the Bellefonte Area School District!

Sincerely,
Tammie Burnaford
Interim Superintendent
Bellefonte Area School District