



Oct. 12, 2020

Dear Bellefonte Area School District Families:

Happy Monday! As promised in my call and email last evening, I want to provide more information about the positive corona virus cases in our district, the department of health guidance, our process and our plans in this weekly letter. I'd also like to take this opportunity to apologize for the timeliness and lateness of my calls. It takes us time to gather information, to formulate plans, and to make the necessary contacts. Unfortunately, this can result in late night calls, but we want to get the information to you as soon as we can. I also want to apologize for the length of this letter in advance, but we think it's important to share as much information as we can.

First, let's start with the usual Centre County and local data update. This week's update for Centre County shows that the number of cases in the county are down slightly. In our local area, our case count has risen, but still remains relatively low. Specifically, during this latest reporting period (Friday, Oct. 2 - Thursday, Oct. 8), there were 12 new positive cases attributed to the 16823 zip code and 1 new case attributed to 16841. As a reminder, these two zip codes also span two other school districts, so the actual cases may not have been in our communities. The data is not broken down by specific municipalities. But, during our calls on Friday, the department of health nurse shared that there have been outbreaks in unspecified establishments and/or businesses in the 16823 zip code.

As I mentioned last evening, 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 ft 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 will need to take the usual precautions. This specific information is copied from the Dept of Health website:

A contact is an individual who had close contact while the case patient was infectious. This person should quarantine themselves, meaning they should stay at home to limit community exposure and watch to see if symptoms develop.

A contact of a contact is an individual who had or continues to have close contact with a contact. This person should take everyday preventative actions, like washing hands, covering coughs and sneezes, and cleaning surfaces frequently, however quarantine is not necessary. This person should also be alert for symptoms.

The PA DOH also provides more information in many of their links on the FAQ page, at:

<https://www.health.pa.gov/topics/disease/coronavirus/Pages/Fact-Sheets.aspx>

Specific Information about contact tracing can be found here:

<https://www.health.pa.gov/topics/disease/coronavirus/Pages/Guidance/Contact-Tracing-Process.aspx>

There is a lot of helpful information on the PDE and PA DOH websites. We use the information on the websites and in our district health and safety plan, and we follow the recommendations of the Department of Health to guide our decisions and plans.

Following the guidance of the PA Department of Health, as of today, 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.

Looking to the positive news, our move to remote learning at the high school and middle school on Friday provided a great opportunity to “practice” our remote instruction. From most reports, the day went very well, but of course, we can always improve. We will continue to try to improve our remote teaching and learning experiences for our students. Thank you for your help and support!

The corona virus 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! Thank you!

Sincerely,
Tammie Burnaford

Interim Superintendent
Bellefonte Area School District