



Good afternoon!

I apologize for the lateness of this email compared to other Mondays. We received so few notifications of new covid cases over the weekend, I wanted to make sure I included any that came this morning. So, over the long weekend and until noon today, we received notification of 7 new covid cases in the district. Three of the cases involve one family. This email also includes more preliminary information about the upcoming availability of covid testing in our schools as we move into the next phase of the coronavirus pandemic. First, the COVID case count update from the weekend and this morning.

COVID Case Count Updates

Over the weekend and early this morning, we received notifications of 7 new positive cases in the district as follows:

- We received notification that a student at the High School tested positive for Covid. The student was not in school while infectious. No contact tracing was needed.
- This morning, we received notification that a staff member at the Middle School tested positive for Covid. The staff member was present for a very short time this morning, but was not otherwise in school while infectious. No contact tracing was needed.
- Over the weekend, we received notification that a staff member and three students from Bellefonte Elementary tested positive for covid. The staff member and 2 of the students were in school while infectious. Contact tracing was completed, but there were no close contacts identified for these cases.
- We received notification that a Marion-Walker Elementary student tested positive for Covid last week. The student in school while infectious, but the timelines have passed for contact tracing.

Any necessary contact tracing was completed for these 7 new cases. There were 0 students identified as close contacts that needed to be quarantined.

Although case counts do seem to be declining, we must remain vigilant. **We are urging parents to continue to work with us and support all personal safety measures.** Additionally, please note that parents **must** keep their students home if they are

sick or have any symptoms. They **must** keep their students home if they are awaiting test results or if someone in the house has tested positive. They also should keep their students home if someone in the house is sick and awaiting test results or if the parents have any notion that their student may have been exposed to a positive case.

COVID Testing Program Update

As I explained in a prior email, we have been exploring a covid testing program as a service for our parents and staff and as part of a layered mitigation strategy. We do not yet have the tests in all of our schools, and we are still working on the paperwork. This week, Mrs. Krisch or I will send more information to parents. The testing program will be completely voluntary for parents, and no tests will be given without parent consent. Parents can give consent electronically, and the upcoming information will explain how to do this.

As you well know, fighting covid and the ever-changing “rules” from the PA Department of Health (PA DoH) and the PA Department of Education (PDE) during this entire pandemic have been extremely challenging. All of the changes in requirements, protocols and processes have been frustrating for all of us. We haven’t been perfect, and we have made mistakes. But, every step of the way, we have tried to be as thoughtful as possible. The more recent PA DoH changes in isolation/quarantine lengths has caused confusion for parents and staff, but we have tried to do the best we can. Importantly, looking back over the past 18 months, we have been able to keep our schools open and we have been able to keep any wide-spread outbreaks out of our schools thus far. We’ve kept our students and staff as safe as possible while trying to meet the needs of everyone. We have been successful because we have worked so well together, even when there seems to be so little support from the PA DoH or PDE. The support of parents and the Bellefonte community has been tremendous. We have adapted and pivoted throughout this pandemic, and we will continue to change our practices to address the new challenges.

Over the past few months, we have noted that most new cases seem to be spread outside of our schools and the symptoms of covid seem to be more broad now. We never know where a person actually contracts the virus, but it seems like it is most likely spread in the homes or outside our schools. Our mitigation efforts at school, such as trying to maintain at least 3-6 ft. of space, regular cleaning routines, voluntary masking, offering K95 and KN95 masks to those who want them, etc. may help lessen the spread at school. We will be keeping these basic mitigation strategies in place for now. However, as we move into this next phase of the pandemic and the number of new cases is declining, our focus in our schools will shift more to those persons who have symptoms rather than strict contact tracing. We have been and will be sliding into this new approach very slowly and carefully.

BUT, we still really need your help, as we transition in the coming weeks. We will continue to ask parents to keep their students home if they have any symptoms of the cold, flu or covid and to keep their students home if someone in the house has tested positive. We will be sending students home who have symptoms of an illness (just as we did pre-pandemic). The availability of voluntary testing for parents who want their own children tested will support those parents who are seeking a test for their child(ren). As mentioned, the details for the voluntary testing program will be sent out by either Mrs. Krisch, our Pandemic Coordinator, or me over the next week. Please stay tuned!

Barring any breaking news, I'll send my next update letter or a brief email on Friday, as usual. As always, thank you so very much for your continued support, patience and understanding through these very challenging times. I hope you have a marvelous Monday and a great week ahead!

Tammie Burnaford
Superintendent
Bellefonte Area School District