



Good morning!

I'd like to provide a short note about the notifications we received over the weekend and to share preliminary information about the upcoming availability of covid testing in our schools. First, the COVID case count update from the weekend:

COVID Case Count Updates

Over the weekend and early this morning, we received notifications of 11 new positive cases in the district as follows:

- We received notification late last night that a staff member at the High School tested positive for Covid. Contact tracing was not fully completed at the time of this writing. Parents will be notified this morning if their children are identified as close contacts.
- Over the weekend and early this morning, we received notification that five students at the Middle School tested positive for Covid. One of the students was not in school while infectious, the other four were. Dr. Garman and Dr Eckenroth had not fully completed contact tracing at the time of this writing. They will notify parents this morning if their children are identified as close contacts.
- Over the weekend, we received notification that a staff member and a student from Bellefonte Elementary tested positive for covid. The staff member was not in school while infectious, so no contact tracing was needed. The student was in school while infectious. Contact tracing was not fully completed at the time of this writing. Parents will be notified this morning if their children are identified as close contacts.
- Early this morning, we received notification that two Marion-Walker Elementary students tested positive for Covid. The students were in school while infectious. Mrs. Krisch had not yet completed contact tracing at the time of this writing. Parents will be notified this morning if their children are identified as close contacts.
- Over the weekend, we received notification that a student from Pleasant Gap Elementary tested positive for Covid. The student was not in school last week or in school while infectious. No contact tracing needed.

The total number of students quarantined as a result of being identified as a close contact in these cases was not determined at the time of this writing. And, as mentioned in the past, please note that some of the cases are a result of a family member, in some cases a sibling, testing positive first.

Although case counts do seem to be starting to decline, 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 Coming Soon

As I mentioned in a prior email, we have been exploring a covid testing program as a service for our parents and staff and as a voluntary part of a layered mitigation strategy. Over the past few weeks, reportedly, tests have been very difficult to find at times. The state's free testing program was not available to us until Jan. 4th. We applied for the program as soon as we could. Over the past week, we got preliminary approvals from the state and the company managing the testing program. We are working as quickly as we can to get the tests in our schools. They will be completely free and completely voluntary for our parents. The rapid tests can be given by our nurses to students on the spot with parent consent. Negative tests will allow students without symptoms to stay in school, too. Mrs. Krisch, our Pandemic Coordinator, and our nurses are working through all of the paperwork and the logistics. We will be sending more parent information in the next week or so. 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