



Good morning!

Where does the time go? There are only 7 more school days until the Thanksgiving break! I hope you and your family were able to enjoy the weekend! I'd like to share some COVID information from the weekend.

COVID Case Count Updates

Over the weekend, we received notifications of two new positive cases in the district as follows:

- A support staff member at Marion-Walker Elementary School tested positive for COVID. This person was present while infectious, but there were no close contacts identified. No students were quarantined at the time of this writing. If this changes, I will include an update in my letter on Friday.
- We received a notice that a high school student who is enrolled in BeLA and CPI tested positive. As such, the student was not present in our high school while infectious. There were no close contacts identified, so no students were quarantined, at the time of this writing. Again, if this status changes, I will include an update in my letter on Friday.

A Note about Recent Local Case Counts

As you may know, I have been closely following the COVID case count numbers for the state, the county, and in our 2 main, local zip codes (16823 and 16841) for well over a year. As I have noted, the case counts have not significantly decreased over the past several weeks. But, on Thursday and Friday of last week, there was a big spike in cases for 16823 with 58 new, confirmed cases over those 2 days. These case count numbers are similar to the numbers during outbreaks last winter. There could be several possible explanations for the spike in case counts in 16823, as we discovered last year (ex: prison and/or nursing home outbreaks, an outbreak in parts of 16823 that aren't within our district, actual outbreaks in our district). We just don't know, and despite our repeated requests, the PA Department of Health (PA DoH) refuses to break down the data by municipality or location for us.

For my reports, I check and record the COVID case count numbers on the PA DoH website daily. On Saturday, I briefly became quite concerned and alarmed when the PA DoH reported a one-day increase of 490 cases in Centre County (the highest one day total ever) and 67 confirmed cases for 16823 for Saturday alone.

After researching and reading various analyses, I found that on Saturday, the PA DoH reported 65 new cases in Centre County, but also added another 425 “older reinfection cases” to report the 490 cases in a one day total. According to information released from the DoH and reported on the statecollege.com website:

“The national case definition was revised and is being implemented in Pennsylvania this week. Under the new national definition, an individual who tests positive more than once at least 90 days apart is counted more than once. Prior to the definition update, Pennsylvania was reporting positive individuals only once.”

To add to the confusion, the PA DoH reported on Saturday that there were an additional 67 confirmed cases in 16823, and according to the PA DoH this includes some of those “old cases.” Adding these “old cases” is making it difficult to determine if we truly have a significant, current outbreak in our zip codes or not. Given past data trends, I am thinking that we could have spikes in the number of new cases in our main zip codes, but not nearly to the alarming level that was suggested in the released DoH data over the past few days, but especially on Saturday. I will continue to follow and analyze the local case counts closely. And, of course, we will keep our district data, as well.

COVID Vaccine

As anticipated, the CDC gave the final approval for the emergency use of the Pfizer Vaccine for children 5-11 years old two weeks ago. Vaccine clinics and vaccine locations are popping up in Centre County for those parents who are interested in having their children vaccinated. More information about the vaccines and local availability can be found on the PA DoH website. Similar to information about other immunizations and health-related concerns, parents of students who are vaccinated may want to add that information to their children’s health record at school by contacting their children’s school nurse. Again, it’s not required to inform our nurses, just a suggestion.

Barring any breaking news, I’ll send my next update email/letter 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