



Bellefonte Area School District

318 North Allegheny Street

Bellefonte, PA 16823

Telephone: (814) 355-4814

Mrs. Tammie L. Burnaford, Superintendent

Dr. Kristopher Vancas, Director of Curriculum and Instruction

Mr. Kenneth G. Bean, Jr., CMA, Director of Fiscal Affairs

Good morning!

Yesterday was an absolutely great start to the 21-22 school year! Students and staff were beyond excited to return to our schools! We always have a few bumps in the road, but it was a very smooth opening overall. Like every year, it does take us a week or so to iron out transportation problems. Thank you so much for your patience as we work through the bumps. We took a lot of pictures from around the district and will get those posted to the website and social media in the next few days. I don't want the excitement of the entire first day to be missed.

Yesterday, Governor Wolf, Alison Beam (Acting Secretary of Health) and Noe Ortega (Secretary of Education) held a press conference to announce a new Order from the PA Department of Health (PA DoH). In short, the Order requires masks to be worn by all students and staff inside all schools in Pennsylvania. The Order overrides district, Board-approved, Health and Safety Plans. While the mandate takes effect on Tuesday, September 7th, the Governor indicated the Order will be reviewed on Oct. 1st.

We received guidance from our school district attorney that indicates legally we must follow the PA DoH Order. Accordingly, our attorney advised that we can be held legally liable collectively as a district or individually if we do not comply with the Order. By not complying, we would be putting our staff and district at risk. Here is a link to the actual Order:

<https://www.health.pa.gov/topics/Documents/Diseases%20and%20Conditions/Order%20of%20the%20Acting%20Secretary%20Directing%20Face%20Coverings%20in%20Schools.pdf>

The PA DoH created a new FAQ page that answers some of the questions that parents have been asking. Here is a link:

<https://www.education.pa.gov/Schools/safeschools/emergencyplanning/COVID-19/SchoolReopeningGuidance/ReopeningPreKto12/MaskingOrder/Pages/FAQs.aspx>

As I mentioned in previous emails, the mask issue is emotionally, and politically, charged and has polarized our country, state and school district. We have received many emails from parents on both sides of the issue. I have read every one of them, and I know the passion that each parent holds in seeking what's best for their own children. I have the utmost respect for our parents, staff and students, and I know how hard we have worked together to keep our staff and students safe and in school over the past year. I continue to struggle to find the right words to say to parents to explain all of this and to try to bring us together.

We are still working through details, particularly when it comes to “enforcement.” Like every other late notice from PDE and the PA DoH over the past 18 months, we have more questions than answers. I will continue to send updates as we get new information. This is what we know right now:

- Some parents have asked if they can transfer their children to BeLA temporarily during the mask Order time frame or beyond. The answer is yes. It may take a few days to get new students registered in the BeLA programs, but we will work with parents who want this option. Please contact your child’s principal if you would like to make the switch.
- The mask requirement applies to only indoors. It doesn’t apply to athletic practices or competitions indoors or outdoors.
- More details about other exceptions and exemptions are included in the Order and in the FAQ’s. We must comply with all aspects of the Order, and we will.
- There is a little good news. The Governor, the PA DoH and PDE were adamant about getting and keeping kids safe and in school this year (we did this last year but there is only a “one size fits all” approach in yesterday’s announcements) and claimed this was the impetus for the Order. So there are new “rules” for quarantining students as I mentioned in previous emails. For example, if a student tests positive for covid and is wearing a mask and a student who is identified as a close contact is wearing a mask, the student who is the close contact does not have to quarantine. With students all wearing masks, there shouldn’t be as many quarantines according to the new rules. But, there still may be some.

My intention is not to stir more emotions or controversy in this email. I’m simply trying to be as open as I can with the information I have at this time. I am hopeful that we can get more guidance legally and from the PA DoH and PDE in the next few days. I’m really not sure what may happen with the state legislature or perhaps even the court system. We could get more information from those arenas, too. I would like to have answers to our questions, so that we can share more information with parents.

However, at this time, with the information we have right now, we must comply with the new DoH Order when it becomes effective on Tuesday, Sept. 7th.

In addition to all of this, Hurricane Ida is headed this direction, and major flooding is a serious concern. That’s on our radar, too. If we need to make any changes to our school day today and/or tomorrow, we will notify parents.

Thank you so very much for your support and all you do for our students. Aside from all that happened in a news conference in Harrisburg yesterday, my heart is warmed by the infectious smiles on the faces of our students as we welcomed them back to school yesterday. I feel so blessed to be part of this awesome school district. I hope you have a wonderful Wednesday!

Sincerely,

Tammie