

Good morning!

The school year is flying by! It's hard to believe that the end of the first nine week period is this Wednesday. I thought I'd share a little more this week, so I am writing this update in letter form. For those who know I tend to get a little wordy, hopefully, it's not going to be too long, but I wanted to share information about COVID and offer a preview to winter weather complications.

COVID Case Count Updates

Over the weekend, we received 1 new notification. A Pleasant Gap Elementary student tested positive for Covid19. The student was in school while infectious last week. However, the student was wearing a mask, and Dr. Besch did not identify any close contacts to the student. There were no quarantines needed.

The case numbers in Centre County rose during the last PA DoH/PDE reporting period (Oct. 22-Oct. 28). The number of new, confirmed cases in 16823 dropped slightly, but the number of new confirmed cases in 16841 seem to be spiking again. I am looking forward to a downward trend, as I am sure most everyone is.

COVID Vaccine

Late last week, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) gave approval for the Pfizer vaccine for children 5-11 years old. The CDC is meeting this week to give final clearance for distribution which could begin within the next week or so. Vaccine clinics may pop up locally for those parents who are interested in having their children vaccinated. 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.

Remote Learning Days versus Flexible Instruction Days

I know it's early yet (let's hope early!), but I want to remind parents from last year and to explain to new parents how Flexible Instruction Days may be utilized if the weather becomes inclement. Remote Learning Days and Flexible Instruction Days are not the same thing, so I'd like to describe the differences.

While we are still in a pandemic emergency, the PA Department of Education (PDE) allows us to use “Remote Learning Days” for mainly COVID-related issues or other emergency conditions (including poor weather, but not as likely). These days include at least some “synchronous” teaching and learning. Typically, teachers will be teaching from their classrooms and students will be learning from home. This means teachers and students must log on to google classroom for at least some “live” teaching/learning. Due to the pandemic, the number of days we can use “Remote Teaching/Learning Days” is unlimited this year. If you recall from last year, we used these types of days during school closures due to COVID issues. Currently, this year, students who have been isolated or quarantined due to COVID may have been able to join for “Remote Learning Days.”

On the other hand, “Flexible Instruction Days” can be used mainly for weather-related reasons. Last year, we submitted an application for Flexible Instruction Days (FID), and PDE approved our application. We are permitted to use up to 5 FID days again this school year. Like last year, FID days are usually taken when the weather forces us to close schools for an entire day. On FID days, teaching and learning is “asynchronous.” This means that there isn’t any “live” teaching and learning during a FID. Teachers will post assignments in Google Classroom early in the morning, and students are expected to complete the assignments at some time during the day, if possible. If not possible, the students can make up the work when we return to school. The benefit to using a FID is that we do not have to make up the day later in the school year or in June. If or when a school closure is announced due to weather conditions, I will indicate if the day is going to be an old-fashioned snow day with no teaching/learning or a Flexible Instruction Day.

I know this is confusing for both parents and students, so I will try to clarify the information through the next few months. I sent a parent letter on Jan. 24, 2021 that was devoted entirely to explaining how weather related decisions are made and describing the different types of days - Remote Learning Days and Flexible Instruction Days. As we get closer to potential weather complications, I will share that letter with parents in its entirety again, too.

The picture that didn’t appear in Friday’s email

No surprise that the picture didn’t come through in Friday’s email update for parents. So, I’m sharing again:

The picture quality isn't great, but this is a picture of Mrs. Poorman, our Agriculture Education teacher at the high school. She was dressed as a garden gnome, standing in the flower garden at the back of the school. She was there very early to greet staff and administrators as they entered the high school Friday morning.



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!

Tammie Burnaford
Superintendent
Bellefonte Area School District