



Bellefonte Area School District

318 North Allegheny Street
Bellefonte, PA 16823
Telephone: (814) 355-4814

Mrs. Tammie L. Burnaford, Superintendent
Dr. Kristopher M. Vancas, Director of Curriculum and Instruction
Mr. Kenneth G. Bean, Jr., CMA, Director of Fiscal Affairs

Inspiring and Preparing Today's Learners to Embrace Tomorrow's Challenges

January 3, 2022

Dear Bellefonte Area School District Parents, Families, Staff and Community:

Happy New Year!!

I hope you and your family had a wonderful break! We are excited to get back to school tomorrow. I want to share more information with parents, as there have been some changes in COVID protocols over the break. I don't have my usual report of the number of cases in our schools because we haven't been in school. But, I want to share the planned COVID strategies in this letter. As we all know, I tend to say a lot, and this information is very confusing (again!). I'll try to keep it as brief as possible. I also attached a summary of the new isolation/quarantine guidelines that we created to try to help parents.

Last week the CDC issued new isolation and quarantine guidelines. This was followed with an interpretation and more guidance from the PA Department of Health on Thursday. The full document PA DoH HAN 615 can be found on the PA DoH website. Over this past weekend, the CDC announced it may be reconsidering the guidelines, but the CDC has not officially changed anything as of 5:00 this evening. The PA Department of Education (PDE) sent an email at 2:30 this afternoon that indicated that school districts are expected to follow the PA DoH HAN 615 community guidance for now, but there will be more guidance, specific to schools, coming from the CDC, the PA DoH and PDE over the next few days. Just like this entire pandemic, anything is subject to change according to the PA DoH and PDE. And, just like the entire pandemic, school districts are left to try to figure it out on our own with many unanswered questions. This leads to inconsistencies among districts. Please know that we are trying to do the best we can to keep all of our students and staff safe and in

school while trying to meet all of the diverse needs of our students, parents, staff and families.

Our administration team met today to discuss and decipher the new guidelines the best we can for our students, parents and families right now. This could all change in a moment's notice. We will let parents know as soon as possible, if so. However, for now, here is where we are:

- We are still following the basic outline and the tenets of our current BASD Health and Safety Plan (HS Plan). The Board will be reviewing our plan over the next few weeks.
- Masks - Our current HS Plan allows parents to choose whether their students wear masks, if their students do not test positive nor have been identified as a close contact. However, if a parent does want their child to wear a mask at school in general, our staff will work with parents to make sure (*as much as we can*) that their children are wearing their masks. Given the increased transmissibility of the omicron variant, parents are highly encouraged to have their children wear masks. Parents who want their child to wear a mask should contact their children's teachers to let them know their wishes. We still have a supply of KN95 masks available for students, if the parents would like their children to wear them. Parents can contact their children's principal, teachers or nurses to get KN95 masks made available to their children. Per a federal mandate, masks are still required of all students on buses. This is unchanged.
- We will continue all of our other mitigation measures as described in the BASD HS Plan, including, but not limited to, physical distancing to the largest extent possible, changes in lunch seating/locations, etc.
- The definition of "close contact" has not changed (within 3-6 ft for more than 15 minutes, same mask vs. no mask rules) However, vaccination status to be exempt from quarantine has changed, though. In the PA DoH guidance, a "booster" is also required under specific circumstances in order to avoid quarantine. (Late breaking news today suggested a booster may be available for 12-15 year olds soon)
- The new PA DoH rules (CDC endorsed) include shorter isolation and quarantine periods. This is all very confusing. I am explaining it here, but it's also summarized in the attached draft document. Also, note that per the PA DoH the first day of symptoms or the day the positive test was collected are considered "Day 0" in calculating dates for isolation and quarantine.
- Isolation - Students who test positive must be in Isolation at home a minimum of 5 days AND should be symptom free before returning to school.

- Quarantines - Students who are identified as a close contact are also a minimum of 5 days. There are different quarantine lengths for students who are identified as close contacts outside the household and those who are also living in the same household as a positive person.
- For both isolation and quarantine, persons absolutely **MUST** wear a mask for an additional 5 days if returning to school on Day 6. Parents may choose to keep their students home (both isolation and quarantine) to do remote learning for 10 days. (note: this is where there could be changes if testing is also required before returning to school, that's sort of what the media is hinting)
- Isolated students who are feeling well enough and quarantined students will be able to login and join their class(es) remotely through Google Classroom, as we have been doing. With potentially more students learning at home over the next week or so, we ask parents to be patient and understanding as teachers try the best they can to offer remote instruction and in-person instruction at the same time.
- Parents **MUST** keep their students home if they are sick or have any symptoms. 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.
- We are considering a voluntary Test-to-Stay program for our students, but only as a service and convenience for parents who would like to participate. We will not do pooled or surveillance testing. But, we may be able to make tests available in our health rooms for students who are asymptomatic, but may have been a close contact. The details of this program still are being worked out. It will take a week or two to get set up, too. I will share details if or when they become available.
- With the decrease in required quarantine and isolation periods being cut to 5 days, there aren't any test-for-early return options like we had in the past. We know that test results were taking longer in December, it's also possible that some of the quarantine time will have passed by the time we know about a positive case. This happened at least a few times already when the length was 10 days.
- Parents are encouraged to email their children's principals if their children test positive, as soon as possible. Principals also can and will provide answers to any questions parents may have. Please reach out to them.
- We want to encourage parents to notify their children's nurses regarding their vaccination status, if they have gotten a vaccination. This is simply to help cut down on the length of time it takes for contact tracing.

We need to work together and get through these next few weeks, one day at a time. We do not want to close schools, but it could occur, if we don't have enough staff or there are significant outbreaks within our classrooms and schools . We fully believe that in person learning is what's best for our students in all aspects - academically, socially, and emotionally. In order to maintain that, we are urging parents to work with us and support personal safety measures again this January.

This was a lot of information, and I couldn't keep it under 4 pages. A summary of the isolation/quarantine guidelines is attached to this email, as well. We originally created it only so that our admin team could all be on the same page. I am sharing it now because I know how confusing all of this is with hope that it does provide parents more simplified information. But, please don't hesitate to reach out to your child's principal if you have questions or need clarification. Principals can also provide exact dates for isolation/quarantine/return for you if your child tests positive or needs to quarantine.

Again, thank you so very much for your support, patience and understanding as we try to navigate these challenging and ever-changing times. Best wishes for the happiest and healthiest new years!

Sincerely,

Tammie Burnaford
Superintendent
Bellefonte Area School District