

November 1, 2020

Dear WCASD Community,

We have just completed our second week of in-person learning at the elementary level. Unfortunately, we have been dealing with COVID-19 'presumed positive' cases at Starkweather Elementary School this week and have been trying to communicate thoroughly about the situation with our Starkweather staff and parents.

None of this is easy or simple. We understand this issue is emotional, and causes a wide variety of concerns and fervently held opinions. Direction from health officials continues to evolve as we all work our way through the pandemic. This is new ground for us, and as educators without medical backgrounds we are taking guidance from health officials. Parents do have the option to keep their children at home, learning remotely, at any time.

Typically, we will not send a notification to our entire community when positive cases or "probable cases" occur. However, since these are our first cases requiring class quarantines, we wanted to share our protocol with our community. This matter may raise questions or cause concerns about how these situations will be handled.

- This week we learned of five students who were symptomatic and who had been exposed to someone who was confirmed as COVID-19 positive. These students were deemed by their own doctors and/or Chester County Health Department as "presumed positive." We were instructed to treat these cases -- and all other "presumed positive" cases - as though they were COVID-19 positive. In each case, any child or adult who had 'close contact' with any of these students (as defined by the CDC as 15 cumulative minutes in a 24 hour period at 6 feet or less) was directly contacted. As a precaution, students in these classes and their teachers will work and learn remotely for a two-week period,
- Presumed positive (also known by the Chester County Department of Health as a "probable case") is a term used by doctors and the Health Department is defined as *"Individuals who have clinically compatible symptoms (i.e. symptoms from the daily health checklist sent to parents), as well as a close contact with someone who has been confirmed to have Covid-19 or identified as a probable case."* A physician or the health department can deem someone "presumed positive." A "confirmed positive" case is one that is verified by a COVID-19 test. We have been instructed to treat both definitions in the same manner.
- When do we make the determination to close a school? According to the Chester County Health Department (CCHD), a school should consider closing when there are three "outbreaks" within a 14 day period. What constitutes an "outbreak"? According to CCHD, an "outbreak" is: *The identification of two or more Covid-19 cases in a class or*

*cohort with an onset within a 14 day period, who are epidemiologically linked and do not share a household or are not close contacts outside the school setting.* As of October 31, the Health Department does not believe we need to consider closing the school based on what has been presented with these cases.

We have been tracking student and staff cases since the summer and created a Covid-19 Dashboard that is updated daily. It can be found at <https://www.wcasd.net/Page/13104>.

While we are making every attempt to keep students and staff members *out of close contact and socially distanced*, there are certainly times when close contact does occur. We are erring on the side of caution and if there is any question about "close contact" we are presuming it has taken place. We are following public health guidance to reduce the risk of transmission of COVID-19 in our schools. For more information, please visit the Chester County Health Department website at <https://www.chesco.org/4376/Coronavirus-COVID-19> or visit the CDC website at <http://www.cdc.gov/covid19>.

Again, we understand (and feel) the stress that this situation causes - for everyone involved, including our staff. We also understand the value of in-person instruction and are doing all we can to safely operate our schools. If you have any questions about this matter, please contact me or any school administrator, including your principal, directly. Anytime we have a COVID-19 exposure, our pandemic response team and I will be directly involved with the Chester County Health Department in addressing it.

While we understand the need to discuss issues with friends and family, we'd always prefer you reach out to us directly rather than speculate about a situation on social media. We believe this can cause further confusion and anxiety. The physical and mental well-being of our students and staff is of utmost importance.

Sincerely,

Dr. Jim Scanlon, Superintendent