

November 11, 2020

Dear WCASD Community,

I am writing to you to provide an update on our model of instruction. I've received a lot of questions about whether we plan to continue in-person, hybrid instruction. Our goal is to do so, as long as health officials tell us it is safe. However, the community transmission of the virus is accelerating quickly. According to health officials and contact tracers, most of this is due to gatherings taking place in the community as well as rec league sports. Earlier today, The CHOP policy lab released information suggesting that schools in the Philadelphia area revert to remote learning until after the New Year. The Chester County Health Department has confirmed it is not making that recommendation to school districts at this time.

As educators without medical backgrounds, we *must* rely on the guidance of health officials. This guidance changes frequently and is often conflicting and contradictory. What is recommended this week may change by next week. We know that each member of our community has extremely strong views about how we should operate during the pandemic. There are no easy or 'right' answers, and simply no way to accommodate everyone's strongly held beliefs. Again, we continue to turn to health officials and do all we can to keep students safe.

Here's what we know as of November 11:

- Once we learn of a case in our schools, we aggressively quarantine staff and students. It is becoming increasingly more difficult to operate our schools when we are short staffed during these quarantine periods. **Of the 51 confirmed cases we have had since August, none have been transmitted in schools.** All have been brought into our schools from the community.
- We have increased our daily substitute pay rate and continue to work to find a variety of solutions to a regional, state, and nationwide substitute teaching shortage.
- Since the beginning of the COVID-19 outbreak, WCASD has been following guidelines established by the Chester County Health Department (CCHD). We are meeting regularly with the CCHD to monitor the most recent COVID-19 cases in our area.
- This week the guidance from the Chester Health Department was revised, suggesting that when rates of community transmission reach very high levels for three consecutive weeks, schools should consider returning to a virtual format. **If these rates remain above the 80 per 100,000 for the next two weeks, there is a possibility that we will return students back to an all-remote format, at least until we get through the upcoming holiday season.**

[Please click here to review the latest updated school guidance issued by CCHD.](#)

The Chester County Health Department provides weekly updates to residents via [COVID-19 Protecting Progress](#), reporting the spread of COVID-19. Based on this weekly data, the county is designated as being in one of four levels of community transmission (low, moderate, high or very high). The level of community transmission is based on two statistics: incidence rate per 100,000 residents, and the percent positivity. Based on these levels, the Chester County Health

Department establishes guidance for school districts (in-person, hybrid, or full remote.) For the week ending November 6, Chester County has been designated as very high, Since the last week in July, when this metric was first introduced, Chester County has been in the moderate to high ranges.

At this point in time, we will continue to operate under the hybrid model of instruction, however we are watching these community transmission rates very closely. We will continue to follow CCHD guidance when determining the instructional model under which to operate. Additionally, there are other factors that we need to consider regarding instructional models:

- COVID-19 community spread in classrooms, individual school buildings, and district-wide
- Lack of bus drivers (Krapf Bus joins with other companies around our region, state, and nation experiencing a driver shortage) to cover necessary runs to get students to and from school for the day
- Teacher absence rate. Without enough teachers, we cannot cover in-person classrooms in a manner that ensures the safety and welfare of students.
- Lack of custodial staff to be able to disinfect and clean buildings nightly
- Ability to provide coverage in health rooms due to nurse absence rate due to illness and/or quarantine

There is one thing upon which health experts continue to agree: In order for schools to remain open, our community must vigilantly guard against spreading the virus: wear masks, remain six feet apart, and do not hold or attend large gatherings or parties - especially if they don't include these measures. If you plan to travel to one of the [travel ban states](#), please quarantine your children from school for two weeks. According to CCHD, the community is where most of the new cases are originating. Meanwhile, please continue use the [daily COVID-19 checklist](#) and monitor your child's health each day before sending them to school. We will continue to closely monitor updates from CCHD and communicate with the community in a timely manner.

If you would prefer your child to learn remotely because of this news, please simply contact your child's classroom teacher.

Thank you for your continued support and understanding as we continue to deal with the complexities of COVID-19.

Sincerely,

Dr. Jim Scanlon

Superintendent