



WILLIAM J. GRETZULA, Ed.D.
Superintendent

PENNSBURY SCHOOL DISTRICT

134 Yardley Avenue • Post Office Box 338
Fallsington, Pennsylvania 19058-0338
Telephone: (215) 428-4111
Fax: (215) 428-4270
www.pennsburyisd.org

November 20, 2020

Dear Pennsbury School District Parents/Guardians,

At this time of year, we pause to reflect upon the many things for which we are grateful. Welcoming back students for the first time in 8 months to physical locations was anything but easy, so I am extremely grateful for all of the staff members who made it possible throughout every part of the organization. The professionalism of our Pennsbury colleagues has been on full display this year, and I could not be more proud to partner with the amazing leaders, educators and staff who support our mission!

As exciting as it has been to see the joy on children's faces, we have obviously entered a concerning period of the pandemic with cases rising exponentially. To ensure the health and safety of students and staff, and to maintain adequate staffing capacity beyond the Thanksgiving holiday, the members of the Board of School Directors voted to have all students participate in remote learning from **November 30th through December 4, 2020**. During the week beginning November 30th:

- All students PK - 12 will participate in remote learning on the dates listed above.
- All schedules will remain the same (schedules will not change for November 30 - December 4 during remote learning). This includes special area classes at the elementary and middle school levels.
- It is expected that all PK - 8 students that have elected hybrid learning will resume the A/B hybrid model on December 7th.
 - a. This includes Phase 1 students in Grades PreK-2 and specialized learning populations.
 - b. This includes Phase 2 students in Grades 3-8.

As for next week, on **November 23rd, 24th and 25th**, Pennsbury School District will continue to hold in-person instruction for our Phase 1 students in our specialized learning populations and for students in PK - 2 who elected such through the hybrid model. This will allow the students and staff time to gather materials needed for remote instruction the following week. Next week's schedule will be as follows:

MISSION

Recognizing our proud traditions and diverse community, the Pennsbury School District prepares all students to become creative, ethical, and critical thinkers for lifelong success in a global society.

- Monday, November 23rd - A group attends + Specialized Learning Populations
- Tuesday, November 24th - A group attends + Specialized Learning Populations
- Wednesday, November 25th - B group attends + Specialized Learning Populations
 - *Look for information from your schools pertaining to the ½ day schedule on Wednesday, November 25th.*

Schools and offices will be closed for Thanksgiving from Thursday, November 26th through Sunday, November 29th. Again, when we return for instruction on November 30th, all students will participate in learning remotely. Students currently enrolled in the remote learning model will not be affected by this change. Those students will continue with remote instruction as previously planned.

Rationale

As we head toward Thanksgiving, we have entered a period in the pandemic that was unfortunately predictable. Cases are up locally, regionally and across the state. These numbers are alarming and are leading to 2 significant challenges for keeping schools open, not just in Pennsbury, but across the county and state:

1. Confidence in contact tracing
2. Staffing to maintain effective instructional delivery in all programs

In the last 18 days, Pennsbury SD has had 23 positive cases of COVID in students and an additional 21 positive cases in staff members. This does not include the many staff members who have been directed to quarantine or isolate due to, or awaiting, close contact determinations. We are aware of other staff and students awaiting results of testing. Again, to date, we have no definitive evidence that these positive cases were contracted in schools.

Despite the best efforts of the Bucks County Department of Health, under the collaborative leadership of Dr. Damsker, contact tracing is slowing down or incomplete. Two weeks ago, at a countywide press conference, it was stated by a county commissioner that approximately 40% of the weekly cases could not be traced. Yesterday, Dr. Damsker shared that on any given day, the percentage is now between 25-50% with some cases back-traced as people return calls. This lag in tracing creates much unrest and anxiety in households and schools. It also delays important communication necessary to ensure schools do not become places of transmission.

Ultimately, the positive cases and requirements to quarantine have led to, and will likely continue to lead to, significant staffing shortages. Absences for legitimate reasons are leading to the need to pull staff from regular assignments to ensure students have an adult in front them for those who report in-person. This has led too often to staff losing preparation periods, math and reading interventionists being pulled from supporting students in need in both settings, special area classes being cancelled so staff can monitor students in their general education classrooms. Paraprofessionals are being asked to cover in locations beyond their normal responsibilities. Everyone is doing the best they can to support one another; however, this is unsustainable and has compromised the strength of the educational delivery system we have built and that kids deserve.

While we currently have no confirmed cases of transmission in schools, the District is anticipating that families may travel or gather over the Thanksgiving holiday. Governor Wolf also imposed travel restrictions that could lead to additional staffing challenges following the holiday break. A helpful FAQ from the state is linked [here](#).

The travel restrictions, beginning today, will require those who travel out of Pennsylvania for something other than work and/or medical care to get a COVID test within 72 hours. If they get a negative result, they can re-enter schools. If not, they remain quarantined for a total of 14 days. It will likely be a struggle for people to access timely testing or get timely results. This will add to the staffing challenge when we return, so we ask all families and staff to adhere to the Governor's orders so we have a better chance of having students in schools in December.

Moving forward, the Board plans to meet on Thursday, December 3rd and will discuss the ability for students and staff in Grades PreK-8 to return for in-person instruction beginning December 7th. Information regarding accessing that meeting will be shared as the event approaches. Thank you in advance for your understanding and continued support. It is one of the many things for which I am grateful.

Happy Thanksgiving,



William J. Gretzula, Ed.D.
District Superintendent
Pennsbury School District