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Superintendent

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November 10, 2020

Dear Pennsbury School District Community,

I am writing to provide an update for the Pennsbury School District Reopening Plans. This Thursday, November 12th, we will welcome back a small group of students to schools for the first time in eight months! Phase 1 invites back specific students with specialized learning needs as well as students in Grades PreK-2. As we return using a hybrid (A/A/B/B/Remote) model, know that Thursday, November 12th is a B day. Friday, November 13th is a full remote day for all students. Monday, November 16th is an A day. Please visit the [District calendar](#) to see which days schools are open in November and beyond. As always, our reopening strategies will follow the District's Health and Safety Plan which can be accessed by clicking [here](#).

Please know that we continue to monitor COVID dashboards closely and speak routinely with members of various health agencies locally and regionally. Additionally, I had the opportunity to join the Bucks County Superintendents yesterday morning in a meeting with two members of the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE): Matthew Stem, Deputy Secretary for Elementary and Secondary Education and Sherri Smith, Director for the Bureau of School Support. The call was requested by PDE this weekend to: a.) Share additional data not readily available on the state's COVID Dashboard, and b.) Discuss implications for PDE recommendations regarding instructional models moving forward.

Dr. Smith began by reviewing the two metrics PDE uses in considering whether counties (and the School Districts therein) are at low, moderate or substantial risk. These are the same that the Board and administrators have referenced in all Board meetings for the past three months (see below):

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.

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Source: [PA School Reopening Guidance](#)

As of 11/6/20, Bucks County has an incidence rate of 107 cases per 100,000 residents and has a 6.2% positivity rate in testing. PDE staff also stated that Bucks' cases over the last seven days contained 65% "community spread" and 35% "outbreak," which is defined as two or more cases traceable to specific locations (e.g: college campuses, senior living facilities) or private events (e.g.: weddings).

Dr. Damsker, Director of the Bucks County Department of Health, shared some different data stating that as of 11/8/20, Bucks County has 83 incidences per 100,000 residents and says the community spread is closer to 20%. There is a shared frustration that the variances in this data make it challenging to accurately relay information to our community and staff members when there is such disparity. PDE also shared the age range for Bucks County cases in the last seven days. See below:

Age Range (Years)	Percentage of Positive Cases
65+	12%
50-64	24%
25-49	40%
19-24	11%
10-18	9%*
5-9	2%*

** Bottom two rows indicate the school-aged population and total 11% of the cases over the past week.*

Based upon the 107 incidences per 100,000 residents, Bucks is now in the “substantial risk” category. For the first week that a county enters the “substantial risk” category, PDE’s recommendation is to proceed as though the county was still in the “moderate” phase. As such, PDE recommends we continue to plan for Phase 1 reopening to begin this Thursday, November 12th.

If Bucks County remains in the “substantial risk” category for a second consecutive week, which would be determined this coming weekend, PDE and the state’s Department of Health would recommend that school districts in Bucks County move into a full remote model of instruction. It is critical to recognize that PDE’s recommendation is just that, and does not carry the weight of a mandate or order as occurred in March 2020. Obviously, there will be much debate about whether we as a District should follow the governmental recommendations moving forward.

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In terms of the duration of PDE's potential recommendation, Mr. Stem shared that the recommendation holds until there are two consecutive weeks of data supporting "moderate risk." Personally, I doubt we will see this level again for several weeks, or months. I also asked what districts around the state are doing relative to the recommendation as 38 of 67 counties are now in the "substantial risk" category. PDE stated that the response is "mixed" with several districts looking to more localized data (e.g.: zip code) rather than county wide data, especially where high rates of transmission can be traced to locations and private events (i.e.: "outbreaks).

We do have a few Board meetings scheduled prior to the planned launch of Phase 2 on December 7th, when we intend to welcome back students in Grades 3-8. The November Action Meeting is scheduled for November 19th and there is typically a special Action Meeting that follows Board Reorganization, which is scheduled for December 3rd. There is also a subsequent Board Action Meeting scheduled for December 17th if any further considerations are necessary. Trust that we will continue to manage and lead throughout this pandemic.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "William J. Gretzula". The signature is fluid and cursive, written in a professional style.

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