

January 11, 2021

Dear Berlin Brothersvalley Families,

The challenges we face as a learning community require all of us to continue to work together for the benefit of our children. The rapid increase of COVID-19 cases in the last couple weeks has prompted a review of many of the same questions we have addressed since March. The purpose of this communication is to share updates on the **mitigation strategies** we continue to implement in our schools, the approach we are taking to **monitor individual cases**, and the criteria used to decide when to pivot our instructional **delivery model**.

### **Virtual/Remote Learning**

On Monday, December 14, 2020 the district reached the critical numbers of positive cases among students and staff which required the district to operate remotely until Monday, January 4, 2021 after the holiday. We hope to remain in our current learning model for the remainder of the year but as you know this can change at a minute's notice. On December 31, we received our order of Chromebooks which were needed to provide all students in grades 3-8 with a device. Our staff worked diligently to prepare the Chromebooks for distribution and by Friday, January 8, all Chromebooks were distributed and ready for student use. This will facilitate the use of Schoology which is our learning management platform. While we believe that in person learning is best for students, we are more prepared to deliver virtual/remote learning should we need to leave our buildings in the future.

### **Mitigation Strategies**

Masks/face shields, social distancing, hygiene, and individual monitoring of health continue to be highly effective as methods for reducing the spread of the virus in our schools. In fact, we still have no direct evidence of spread being caused by our face-to-face instructional model. Indicators show that schools, when compared to most other areas in our community, are places that have effectively mitigated the spread of the virus.

**It is critical for anyone who is ill and/or tests positive or is in contact with a positive case to stay at home.**

We cannot return or stay with in person instruction if cases are identified in our buildings and among our students and staff. We understand that this cannot always be predicted but ask that everyone be particularly cautious due to the fragile nature of being able to continue in person learning. We believe that in person learning is the best option but are not permitted to operate when a critical number of cases are identified.

### **Mask and Travel Requirements**

The Department of Health increased restrictions regarding mask wearing and quarantining after travel.

- The Order indicates all alternatives to wearing a face covering, including the use of a face shield, should be exhausted before an individual is exempted from this Order.

- The Order provides an exception in Section 3 which indicates “if wearing a face covering would either cause a medical condition, or exacerbate an existing one, including respiratory issues that impede breathing, a mental health condition or a disability.” The order indicates all alternatives to wearing a face covering, including the use of a face shield, should be exhausted before an individual is excepted from this Order. In addition, “if the sport, equipment, or exertion level does not allow for face covering to be worn safely then the athlete should not wear a face covering.”
  - Any individual who leaves the state of Pennsylvania must obtain a negative COVID-19 test with results dated after leaving PA and not more than 3 days prior to returning to Pennsylvania or quarantine. (*Check the Health FAQ on the website for specific information and updates regarding quarantine guidelines.*)
- ✓ **Please contact Mrs. Ritchey, School Nurse, or your principal due to any uncertainty you may have regarding your child’s health status. Students should stay at home until you have spoken with Mrs. Ritchey or your school principal. It is critical for all of us to protect our learning community!!**

### **Monitoring Individual Cases**

Mrs. Ritchey continues to monitor and track all incidences of COVID-19 in our school community. In all of these situations, we work with the Pennsylvania Department of Health to ensure safety protocols are followed and contact tracing is completed. Our teachers and staff have reviewed all seating and distancing arrangements in classrooms, cafeteria, and other areas where close contact may result in student and staff being identified for quarantine. We have reduced student and staff contact by strategic groupings and distancing students to the maximum extent feasible in all areas of the buildings. We will continue to make changes in our protocols as needed to enhance social distancing, hygiene guidelines and identification processes.

### **Delivery Model Pivot**

A guiding principle of our plan from the beginning was to have the ability to pivot our delivery model when circumstances warrant such a change. We continue to monitor cases of COVID-19 in consultation with medical professionals, including the Department of Health. If our decision can be made on a building by building basis we will make that distinction in moving to remote learning. In the current situation, the COVID-19 issue was across the entire district which required the entire district to transition to the remote learning model.

I want to assure you; we monitor cases on an hour by hour basis in each of our buildings. We will continue to consult with medical professionals on the criteria used to make decisions about the delivery model in each individual building. Our approach is a measured effort that uses what we continue to learn about the virus and how it spreads while honoring the partnerships we have as a learning community.

**Breakfast/Lunch and Take Home Meals**

All Students PK through 18 years of age are eligible for Free Meals from our school district, whether you are SCTC students, Cyber, Learning Remotely or as a resident attending other schools you can benefit from this SOS feeding program. To sign up to receive a meal each day call Mrs. Cathy Berkebile at 267-6950 before 9:00 each day. Pick up is in the middle school gym between 10:30 and 12 noon Monday through Friday.