

Updates from the District Office

Summary of Revised Interim Guidance regarding social distancing and virus-management requirements in New York State

April 16, 2021

Dear Parents and Caregivers –

I wanted to take a few moments to share with you some information related to last week's release of [revised guidance from the NYS Department of Health](#) that focused on a number of virus-management requirements including social/physical distancing. This follows the [release of guidance from the Centers for Disease Control](#) (CDC) on March 19. As we occasionally receive questions regarding CDC guidance and why we are not adhering to it, please be aware that as a school district, our first obligation is to follow the directives of the Governor and the state agencies including the Departments of Health and Education.

Over the past week we have been working with our attorneys, local and regional health officials, and other district colleagues to refine our understanding of the document and what is required, what is recommended, and what some of the otherwise vague language actually means for us. This is an important step for us because, as directed by the state, any changes to [our current plan](#) can only be made after getting input from *administrators, faculty, staff, students, parents/legal guardians of students, local health departments, local health care providers, and, where appropriate, affiliated organizations (e.g., union, alumni, and/or community-based groups)*.¹

For now, here are a few of the highlights from the new guidance that we [presented to the Board](#) at this week's meeting that I hope will begin to answer some of your questions/clear up some of the confusion that we are hearing:

- a. **Distancing** – In addition to getting input from each of the groups noted above,
 - i. **Elementary** students *may* be seated 3 feet apart during instruction, but *must* remain at 6 feet during meals. Our students currently eat in their classrooms and so any adjustments to 3 feet would have to then be able to accommodate a 6 foot distance for eating. We recently began conversations with principals about this and those conversations will continue next week.
 - ii. **Middle and High School** students who attend school in a county that has been [classified by the CDC](#) as having a “high level of community transmission” (of the 62 counties in NYS, 54 are currently classified this way) *may* be seated 3 feet apart *if* they can be placed in a “cohort” (a small group of students that stay together throughout the day). Students in these grades must also follow the 6 foot rule when eating. However, because the vast majority of high schools cannot meet the cohort rule without significantly changing course structures and attendance rules. Because we are in the middle of a semester, there is no practical opportunity to make changes in these grades until such time as the CDC's classification of the county changes. At this time, we simply cannot predict when that might happen.

¹ https://www.governor.ny.gov/sites/default/files/atoms/files/Pre-K_to_Grade_12_Schools_MasterGuidance.pdf, page 1.

- b. Transportation – The rules currently in place have not changed in that students should remain separated by 6 feet unless they are members of the same household. As noted in the guidance, the state continues to encourage parents to drive students to school to the greatest extent possible. This will not only continue to have an impact on the congestion that is experienced at our Wood Road complex in particular, but will also impact our ability to host certain spring sports as we will not be able to provide transportation for all students and all teams. A separate mailing related to this will be sent from the Athletic Office to parents of student athletes asking for their assistance in transporting student athletes to practices and games.
- c. Masks – This is a new rule in that **masks must now be worn at all times** unless students are eating or playing an instrument (during which they must be at least 6 feet apart. The revised guidance removes the option for masks breaks. The CDC has also revised what type of masks are accepted. This information can be found [HERE](#). **Effective Monday, April 19, please ensure that masks are worn at all times.**
- d. Daily Health Screenings – These must remain in place meaning that our daily Pinpoint registration must continue.

As we continue our work to develop a clearer understanding of these rules, we are also watching to see if there will be an increase in positive cases from the recent spring break. This week was very promising for us in that we have only had [one positive student case](#) and that did not impact our operations as the student had not been in attendance recently. (We did have two positive cases for students from other districts who attend our PTech program that required students from one class to quarantine.) We are certainly hopeful that this trend will continue next week! Please continue to report positive cases to us at COVIDreporting@bscsd.org.

Further, we are also watching our calendar and considering whether any changes related to this guidance will be beneficial to teaching and learning or if instead any changes might be more disruptive given the limited number of days that we have remaining in the year and the fact that we have found a fairly consistent operating daily rhythm at this point.

Over the coming days, we will hold a number of meetings to discuss our options and get input from the various aforementioned groups all while beginning to prepare for what the fall semester may look like if any of these restrictions will remain in place. We will continue to communicate with you all as we proceed.

Should you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact us at schoolopenings@bscsd.org.

Thanks very much.

Ken

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