



November 20, 2020

Dear Parents/Guardians,

The Michigan Department of Health and Human Services released a new Emergency Order on Sunday, November 15 that impacted all schools in Michigan. One of the provisions of the new Emergency Order requires high school students in grades 9-12 to transition to remote learning starting on Wednesday, November 18 through Tuesday, December 8. The Emergency Order, does allow local school districts to continue providing "in-person" learning to high school students receiving special education services and receiving support as an English Language Learner. Another provision of this new Emergency Order allows grades PreK-8 to continue with "in-person" learning.

Berrien Springs Public Schools will continue with "in-person" learning in grades PreK-8 at this time, with the exception of 3<sup>rd</sup> grade which transitioned to remote learning for the period of November 16 through November 25. High school students receiving special education services or receiving support as English Language Learners have been provided with opportunities for "in-person" learning during the mandated period of remote learning through December 8.

The state's decision to transition grades 9-12 only to remote learning was based on state-wide data. High school age students state-wide currently account for approximately 2/3 of the confirmed COVID cases associated with school settings. The MDHHS stated in their press release, "Michigan has seen fewer outbreaks associated with elementary and middle schools, and younger children are most in need of in-person instruction." Berrien Springs Public Schools has recorded 20 confirmed COVID cases since the start of the school year. Ten of these cases, or 50% are high school aged students. This number also includes 2 students who have been learning virtually since the start of the school year. These students have had no contact with staff or other district students. Knowing this data, our district would have continued to provide students and families with the option of in-person learning at the high school.

As the district continues to closely monitor the impact of COVID-19 in our communities and school district, there are several factors that will be considered in making the decision to transition to 100% remote learning for our students. The two primary factors are the following:

1. Safety of the School Environment
2. Operational Capacity

In assessing the ongoing safety of the school environment, the district will give consideration to COVID related data in Berrien County. However, it should be noted

that since the start of the school year, community COVID related data in Berrien County has not directly correlated to the COVID related data associated with Berrien County school districts. As the number of COVID cases continues to increase throughout the county, data and information changes daily. For the most accurate updates and a summary of key COVID related data, please visit the Berrien County Health Department's website at <https://www.berriencounty.org/1685/Coronavirus-COVID-19-Information>.

The following is a summary of school related COVID data for all Berrien County schools:

- Current mitigation strategies being implemented in our schools
  1. Wearing face masks
  2. Practicing social distancing where possible
  3. Practicing good hand hygiene
  4. Cleaning & disinfecting
  5. Contact tracing
- Berrien County School COVID Case Data (as of November 19, 2020)
  1. 243 confirmed cases associated with Berrien County schools
  2. The 243 cases represent 4.3% of all Berrien County COVID cases
  3. 4 cases with likely transmission that occurred in a school setting
  4. The 4 case transmissions in a school setting is less than 1% of all COVID transmission in the county

Below is a summary of the key factors that will influence the school district's decision to transition to 100% remote learning:

1. Berrien County Health Department Data
2. School Spread of the Virus
3. School Operational Capacity
4. Strategic/Incremental Closure
5. Consideration for All At-Risk Student Learners

As COVID cases continue to increase county-wide, including cases associated with schools, based on the data collected to date schools continue to be one of the safest environments in our communities. The decision to transition to remote learning will primarily be influenced by our school district's ability to meet the staffing capacity required to keep classrooms open and educational programs operating. The operational criteria our district administration will consider will be the following:

1. Number of students absent (daily)
  - Absent due to quarantine/isolation/illness
  - Absent due to family decisions to keep a student(s) home

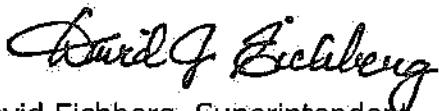
2. Number of staff absences (daily)
  - Absent due to confirmed COVID case
  - Absent due to quarantine/isolation
  - Absent due to other illness
3. Number of unfilled substitute teacher positions (daily)
4. Number of teachers supporting both "in-person" learning and remote learning (students absent from school) on a daily basis
5. Number of parents informing the school of their decision to transition their student(s) to virtual learning at the start of the 2<sup>nd</sup> semester

Currently, the district is experiencing daily challenges with our ability to hire an adequate number of substitute teachers to cover staff absences, which impacts the district's ability to adequately staff classrooms. We are using every available staff member, including building administrators, existing teachers during their planning periods and other instructional support employees to assist with classroom instruction. Our district is committed to providing "in-person" learning for as long as there is staffing capacity. However, I'm letting parents/guardians know that the district's ability to adequately staff classrooms in the future may be in jeopardy if the current COVID case trends continue to increase.

Should it be necessary for our school district to transition to 100% remote learning in all grades PreK-12, we will communicate in advance about the details of the remote learning plan. Please be reminded the school district has scheduled a 2<sup>nd</sup> "practice remote learning" day for all students PreK-12 on Wednesday, December 9. All students will be learning from home on that date.

I continue to marvel at our staff's ability to provide rich and meaningful learning experiences for our students during a nation-wide pandemic. Your continued trust and support in the school district to provide a safe learning environment is greatly appreciated and valued!

Sincerely,



David Eichberg, Superintendent