



DRYDEN

CENTRAL SCHOOL DISTRICT

P.O. Box 88
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December 21, 2020

Dear Families, Staff, and Students:

I hope this letter finds each of you well. Our ability as a community to stay strong and resilient is a testament to who we are. I continue to be proud of our work, of where I live, and that I “bleed” purple. However, the crisis is not over.

I wanted to take some time to share with you where the Dryden Central School District is in the context of the public health crisis and what our tentative plans are moving forward. As COVID-19 continues to throw at us fully inflated red playground balls that require us to duck, dive, dodge and **dodge** some more, I continually ask myself, “What do I know?” “What are the facts”? The following is what I know right now in this moment as I write each of you. I know:

- Between 30-NOV-2020 and 07-DEC-2020, the District had 11 community members test positive for COVID-19.
- As a result of these 11 cases, 233 individuals in the District had to be quarantined.
- 62 of the 233 needing to be quarantined were staff.
- 166 of the 233 needing to be quarantined were students.
- The resulting impact incapacitated the District's ability to service students in person. We could not transport, feed, educate, support offices, or meet any bargaining units' contractual obligations for remaining staff.
- None of these 11 cases are connected to each other. The Public Health Department has continuously indicated after each positive case that there is not any indication of community spread in the District. COVID-19 is being brought **into** the District not being spread **by** the District.
- 1.5%, .49%, .41%, and .19% of positive COVID-19 cases in NYS occur through transmissions of education staff members, elementary students, HS students, and MS students respectively.
- **74% of positive COVID-19 cases in NYS occur through transmissions at family and social gatherings.**
- 4 of the 11 cases that week can trace the origin of their transmission to a large social gathering held recently in our community (these individuals did not necessarily attend but were exposed by someone who did or by someone else who tested positive from being exposed by someone at that gathering).
- Between 09-DEC-2020 and 21-DEC-2020, eight more community members across DES, DMS, and DHS have tested positive for COVID-19 (this serves as official notification of these cases).

I also know that after 3.5 months of in person instruction and looking at state and District data that the District has lived its core belief to provide a safe, joyful and nurturing environment. I also know that the best predictor of future behavior is past behavior.

As we head into the Christmas and New Year holidays, with the exception of the Southern Tier and New York City no region in NYS has a positivity rate less than 5%. From my perspective in my position, when I look at national, NYS, and local data, I cannot help but feel that reopening to in person instruction on 04-JAN-2021 will put the District right back in a similar situation that it found itself in on 07-DEC-2020.

As a result, the District will delay the return to in person instruction until **11-JAN-2021**. Students will learn 100% remotely 04-JAN-2021 through 08-JAN-2021. If students attend outside placements and those placements are open to in person instruction, students should attend and we will transport them. It should be noted that this plan is tentative and subject to change due to a variety of factors.

By delaying the start of in-person instruction to **11-JAN-2021**, my hope is that positive cases that are identified during the week after the Winter Holidays will not require me to contact trace/quarantine as many staff members allowing the District to stay open to in person instruction after an in person start date of **11-JAN-2021**. More information will be following this message in the coming days regarding food as well as a material delivery on 04-JAN-2021.



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Please know my head and my heart want the same thing, but they “feel” two different things, and this decision while looking dispassionately at the facts seems easy to make; however, it was not. My heart knows the last two weeks have been difficult for families. I know people have lost income in the last two weeks. I know schedules have been disrupted. I know student’s mental health is suffering. I know that the last two weeks have reduced exposure for our community by not being “in-person”, but have caused “exposures” to other dangers including disruption in their education. These “exposures” are often just as life threatening as COVID-19. My mind is at peace with the decision, but my heart is not.

I know this decision will not be popular with everyone in our community. I most often hear the following two concerns. I have people in our community ask me what am I or the District doing to keep everyone safe. I also hear from community members who tell me “enough is enough”, remind me that our children have already lost so much since 13-MAR-2020, and ask me when I will let things go back to normal.

As we head into peak Holiday season, my response to the first concern is that NYS and District data indicate the District is keeping people safe. So, if 74% of transmissions in NYS occur at family and social gatherings, 4 of the 11 cases in the District between 11/30 and 12/7 can trace its origins to a social gathering in our community, and if safety and in person instruction truly are the priorities for the community, my question back is what each individual in our school community doing to keep people safe?

The second set of concerns are all understandable. I am the first to admit that I have hated not having proms, homecoming, concerts, Halloween parades, athletic contests, and staff luncheons. These are the things that shape a District’s culture. Our students have been required to give up so much. We have been incredibly lucky as a nation. Not since WWII has the country collectively had to sacrifice so much. Even after 9/11 with a country at war on two fronts, for most Americans life did not and has not changed.” So, again I ask, if 74% of transmissions in NYS occur at family and social gatherings and people really feel “enough is enough” what is each individual in our school community doing to alter the trajectory of the pandemic so that our students do not have to give up any more than they already have?

The pandemic is not just the District’s problem to solve. It is not the sole responsibility of the District to keep everyone safe. It is not the sole responsibility of the District to develop work arounds for everything that cannot happen as normal. This is not an “us” or “them” problem. This is a “we” problem and we have been doing more than pretty good. However, we have to keep going and success hinges on everyone doing their part.

I look forward to speaking more about the District’s tentative plan as we move forward on this afternoon’s Facebook Live Session scheduled for 4:00 PM.

Take care of yourself. Take care of each other. As always...

#LionPride,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Joshua I. Bacigalupi". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "J" and "B".

Joshua I. Bacigalupi
Superintendent of Schools