

Washington
Township
Public
Schools



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Office of the Superintendent
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September 10, 2021

Dear WTPS Families:

With the school year now successfully underway, I wanted to take time to review some of the challenges our District is facing and make clear the safety protocols we are following in relation to the quarantining of staff and students.

We are in our sixth day of instruction, and all is going well. We have had, however, to do a lot of contact tracing, and in some cases, we have had to quarantine members of our staff and student population. This will be an ongoing concern as long as contact tracing and subsequent quarantining of our school community is required. Please be assured that we are working tirelessly to minimize the impact of the rules related to exclusion.

Essentially, a close contact is any person who is within six (6) feet of an infected individual for more than 15 cumulative minutes during a 24-hour period. When it comes to our students, there is an exception. If students are fully masked and are within three to six (3-6) feet of an infected person, they may not need to quarantine. As I have mentioned in the past, this change is impactful because it will help us keep our kids in school. Since our kids need to remove their masks to eat during the school day, our biggest challenge still remains keeping our students safe while they are unmasked.

As all of our kids have returned to the buildings, space also is an issue. Our ability to keep them six- feet apart is not possible in most cases, and, in some cases, keeping them three-feet apart, is a challenge. But we are doing our best to accomplish this.

Currently, we are working on a plan to return our elementary students to the cafeteria for lunch. This will allow us to decrease the time spent in each classroom, when masks may be off only during breaks, breakfast, and snack. Our goal is to prevent masks from being off in our classrooms for 15 minutes or less. This will minimize our close contacts and reduce the numbers of students who might otherwise have to quarantine.

Returning to cafeterias allows us to put greater distance between unmasked children. We will have fewer students within three to six feet of one another at lunch, thus assisting in our mission of reducing close contacts. In the end, we are doing all we can to help keep everyone be safe and minimize time out of school.

Although our in-school close contacts have been minimal, we are experiencing the need to quarantine students due to close contacts occurring outside of school. Keeping children home when they exhibit any signs and symptoms of COVID and having them tested while not in school will continue to go a long way in helping minimize in-school close contacts and transmission.

If you do receive a call from your school regarding the need to quarantine your child, please afford our nurses and administrators the grace and respect they deserve. This has been a difficult task. Contact tracing is a tedious and time-consuming process and making phone calls to let parents know they need to quarantine is not a task anyone looks forward to. We are grateful for the difficult work that our nurses continue to shoulder. We are all operating under a specific set of rules, and the District has the responsibility to enforce those rules for the safety and well-being of everyone in our buildings.

Lastly, it is important to note that every Thursday the New Jersey Department of Health updates the COVID CALI Score by region. Gloucester County is in the Southwest Region, along with Salem and Camden County. The CALI score dictates what phase of the epidemic we are in and drives decision-making relative to the timetable for exclusion. Currently we are in the moderate (yellow) phase. This calls for a 10-day quarantine from the day of last exposure for a close contact, or 10 days from a positive test or onset of symptoms of a Covid Positive person. If we elevate to the high (orange) phase, it increases to 14 days for close contacts, but remains 10 days for COVID-Positive Persons.

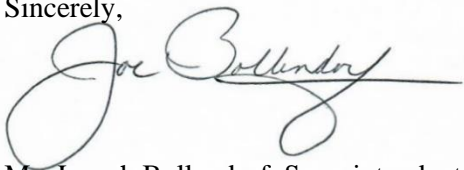
Here is a [link](#) to the NJDOH Guidelines updated on August 31, 2021.

Here is a [link](#) to frequently asked Question from the District.

I realize that many of us are COVID and contact-tracing fatigued. I also realize that much of what I am sending has been communicated many times before. However, with so much going on, and recurring and frequent changes, I felt it important to forward this letter as a reference should you find yourself the recipient of a call from your child's school. I appreciate you taking the time to read it and doing your part to assist us in keeping our kids and teachers in the classroom and engaged in in-person learning.

It is great to see our schools full and energized, and we are all working hard to keep these learning environments healthy and thriving for the sake of our students, staff, and families. Please do not hesitate to email me, or your child's school, with any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Joe Bollendorf". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looping initial "J".

Mr. Joseph Bollendorf, Superintendent