



November 27, 2020

Re: District going full remote until Monday, December 7th

Dear WTPS Families and Staff,

In the past 24 hours the number of staff and students needing to quarantine due to being deemed “close contacts” of COVID positive folks has continued to increase. The high school is already scheduled to be remote this coming week, but due to this continuing surge and our inability to staff other schools in the district, we have no choice but to extend remote instruction for the entire district until Monday, December 7th when we hope to return to our hybrid schedule.

We have worked tirelessly to keep all our schools open during these past three months, however, the cases are increasing at such an alarming rate that our ability to keep our buildings open has been significantly compromised.

The New Jersey Department of Health divided the state into 6 regions. Weekly, the State issues a COVID Activity Report. They report on the case rate, the COVID illness rate, and the positivity rate of each region and give a combined score for each region called a COVID Activity Level Index (CALI) score. For the first time last week our region, the Southwest region, was rated at the HIGH Rate (orange). This week we remain in the Orange Level; however, the case rate went into the very high, RED Level for the first time. I have attached the latest report for your review.

Being in the Orange Level has changed protocols for determining staff and students who need to quarantine in a significant way. This is a large part of the reason we are seeing an alarming increase in those numbers. Prior to last week the District and County only completed contact tracing and quarantining close contacts for confirmed positive COVID cases. In the Orange Level, contact tracing and quarantining of close contacts are required to be completed at the *onset of confirmed symptoms* of any members of our staff or student body. This has increased the volume of contact tracing and has exponentially increased the number of staff and students who have to quarantine pending test results. This has begun to cripple our staffing which impacts our ability to remain in the hybrid schedule.

Therefore, we must extend remote instruction until Monday, December 7th. We will continue to monitor our cases. Many predict an even higher surge due to the holiday, but that remains to be seen. We will also continue to receive our weekly activity level reports from the state. If cases continue to rise it is possible that the Southwest region will be designated as very high (red) in which case all schools in the region will be directed by the New Jersey Department of Health to close and pivot to full remote. We anticipate the next CALI report will be released by the NJDOH on Thursday, December 3.

Please know that this decision does not come lightly. Many will be concerned that we did not make this decision sooner, but please know that we respond to the best available information as it presents itself to us.

First and foremost we want to do everything we can to continue to make our schools available for live instruction for the families that have selected this instructional option, and for our most vulnerable population that need live contact with our staff. We want to be open to serve our children; however, we also have a responsibility to protect all that we serve, both staff and students. Currently, our ability to do that has been seriously compromised, so we must do what is right for the health and safety of all.

We will continue to communicate as more information becomes available in the coming days and weeks. In the meantime, **all staff will work remotely except for staff in Central Administration and Operations.**

I sincerely hope you all had an enjoyable Thanksgiving. Despite the difficulties of our time, we still have much to be thankful for. We will get through this together and, as always, I appreciate your continued support.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Joseph N. Bollendorf". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Joseph N. Bollendorf
Superintendent of Schools