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September 4, 2020

Dear Parents/Guardians:

First, I would like to thank you all for your support during our first two weeks of school! Our students and staff have done a great job following our health and safety protocols, and it has been such a blessing to have happy students back in our buildings. We thank you for reinforcing and encouraging your children to follow these protocols and for partnering with TASD during this very challenging time. We have a long road ahead and all of us will play an important role in our continued success.

As of today, we have had no reports of positive COVID-19 cases within our schools. We know that this may not always be the case as evidenced by reports from local school districts and other school districts across the country. We have continued to receive additional guidance from the PA Department of Health (DoH) about how we should react if/when there are positive cases in our schools. Because every scenario is slightly different, we will always consult with the DoH before having to quarantine a classroom, close a school, or change our current instructional model.

I would like to offer the following reminders to you as we move into our third week:

**Communication:** First and foremost, it is our goal to communicate with our parents openly regarding COVID within the schools. It is never our intent to keep anything from you or the community. With that being said, we are limited by law as to what we can share. Likewise, it is very important that the communication from home regarding illness and/or possible exposures to the virus be open and honest. Our school nurses are great points of contact for you and are ready to assist you in any way that they can. The best way to mitigate the spread of the virus is to participate in open, two-way communication.

**Confidentiality:** The law is very clear that it is a violation of a person's privacy rights to share health information. This includes a positive COVID diagnosis. We must do everything we can to protect the identity of anyone who may test positive as per the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 (HIPAA). For this reason, school districts may need to be somewhat vague about specifically where or when a case is identified.

**COVID-19 Symptoms:** The likelihood of a student or staff member experiencing symptoms that resemble COVID-19 will continue to grow as we approach the cold and flu season. Symptoms such as cough, fever of 100.4, chills, and body aches, though signs of COVID, can also be an indication of many other viruses that occur this time of year. The school community WILL NOT be notified every time an individual is sent home with symptoms. The individual displaying symptoms that are consistent with COVID will be isolated immediately and sent home with a referral from the school nurse to see his/her health care provider. The individual will be advised to stay home for 24 hours following display of symptoms and provide proof of clearance by a medical professional OR until a negative test result is received. If the family does not provide a medical clearance or evidence of a negative COVID test, the child will be excluded from school for 10 days from the onset of symptoms. It is important to remember that test results for many of those tested statewide for COVID are negative.

**Positive COVID-19 Case:** If the district is notified that a student or staff member has tested positive for COVID-19, the Department of Health will immediately be contacted. Contact tracing will be initiated to determine who has been in close contact with the individual. According to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), a **close contact** is defined as “within 6 feet of an infected person for at least 15 minutes from 2 days before illness onset until the time the patient is isolated.” The parents of all those in close contact with a confirmed positive case will be individually contacted by school or DoH personnel and may be advised to self-quarantine.

The DoH will work with school and district administration to determine whether an entire classroom or larger cohort group would be identified as “**close contact**” and therefore recommended to monitor or self-quarantine. Close contacts may be directed to self-quarantine for 14 days from the last exposure to the case. This could include anyone who is a household contact (same family) and who may attend another school. CDC guidance on close contacts may continue to change, so the directive to quarantine may vary from case to case.

Any individual who has not been in contact with the positive case but who HAS been in contact with someone who is identified as a “close contact” would be considered a “**second level contact.**” An example would be if your child is in the same class with a child whose sibling has tested positive. There is NO NEED for a second level contact to quarantine. The DoH advises that second level contacts should monitor for symptoms and continue to exercise the use of face coverings and social distancing.

**Decision to Close a School:** The DoH has provided guidelines to school districts regarding the closure of a school in the event that a positive COVID case or multiple positive COVID cases should occur within a 14-day period. Based on the number of cases identified, the intervention could range from a deep cleaning of any area where the positive case occupied, to closing the school for 5-7 days, to closing the school for 14 days. When an entire school is recommended to close, the length of the closure time will vary by the level of the community transmission and the number of cases. Closing schools will allow for intensified sanitizing of all affected areas as well as give the DoH staff additional time to complete contact tracing and case impact.

As indicated above, there are many factors that will determine the appropriate action to take in the event of a positive COVID-19 case. Our goal will be to communicate as much information as we can while respecting the privacy of those impacted. We will continue to consult with the Department of Health and evaluate state guidance while considering the health of our students and staff a priority when making educational decisions throughout the school year.

Thank you for your continued support and cooperation through this challenging time.

Sincerely,

Leslie Estep  
Superintendent of Schools