

To: Parents & Guardians
Benton Community School District

Fr: Dr. Pamela Ewell, Superintendent

Date: 11/6/20



Dear Parents and Guardians,

The purpose of this communication is to: 1) review and discuss COVID-19 protocols and procedures, 2) further explain our Return to Learn Plans in the event we are short on staff to run and operate our schools or if COVID-19 positive cases in our school's increase to 10% or more, 3) update parents and guardians about our current status and the county data explained, and provide resources and information.

To begin, I want to thank everyone for their patience and kindness during the past several months while we navigated the impact of COVID-19 and the derecho storm. We are a resilient Bobcat family, striving each day for educational excellence!

1. COVID-19

When I reflect on my past 39 years in education, it is clear that COVID-19 has become the most disruptive we have experienced in schools. Not only have we restructured schedules, activities, events and daily routines, but we have limited contact between students and students with their teachers. Limiting the distance between people is contradictory to everything we know about the importance of relationships and connecting with our students. However, we seek to find ways to continue to build strong positive relationships with our students despite COVID-19.

We communicate regularly with our staff, students, and Benton County Public Health as we monitor each positive case of COVID-19. Positive cases mean that an individual has tested positive by their medical health professional or have received results from a testing center. Benton County Public Health is also informed by the state if an individual tests positive. The information regarding positive cases is highly confidential and governed by HIPAA Privacy.

We conduct contact tracing with the help of Benton Co. to determine if others need to quarantine. Notifications are sent out to staff and parents depending on the exposure and situation.

I am working on a public communication dashboard to inform our patrons about positive COVID-19 cases. The Iowa Department of Public Health requires NOT posting positive cases <6 on any given day due to HIPAA requirements and personal rights to privacy. Expect to see a dashboard on our website very soon!

We also track individuals who need to quarantine due to exposure to someone with COVID-19 (exposure is defined as being within 6 feet of a person testing positive for 15 minutes or greater in the 48 hours before or any time after the infected individual's symptoms started AND one or both parties were not appropriately wearing face coverings or acceptable face coverings).

As long as this information or data is not exploiting or identifying individuals due to HIPAA requirements, we will also show this on our [dashboard](#).

2. 10% positivity of COVID or other serious illness in schools

If a school reaches 10% of their student population of active positive cases of COVID-19 or reported illness of any kind (not students who are quarantined), we work closely with public health to determine if closing a school or the entire school district would help mitigate the spread.

10% is approximately 165 students across our entire school district. 10% absences with positive COVID-19 or other illnesses would also apply for each building separately.

I recall needing to close a school when the H1N1 flu pandemic first began to reach 10% active illnesses and absence. We closed for 4 days to disinfect and sanitize classrooms, doorknobs, desks, buses, etc... Closing for a few days accomplished our objective.

If we reach 10% absenteeism due to illness, expect that we will be communicating with our staff, parents, and students to determine our next steps. Most likely, we will close and immediately move to all online learning using Seesaw and Schoology. All activities and events would then be canceled or postponed during the closure.

10% Illness [Resource](#)

3. COVID-19 situations for our staff

COVID-19 seems to affect individuals randomly and differently. For some it can be extreme, even fatal. We have experienced positive cases for our staff members and send notifications to parents when we have a positive case with a student or staff. We do not differentiate in our notifications for purposes of HIPAA and privacy.

We monitor the situation daily and the work due to COVID-19 has increased the workload for many such as our administrators, nurses, guidance counselors, Central Office Staff, and our building secretaries. Our teaching staff have substantially increased their daily work load while teaching students in person and providing learning experiences for our students engaging online through Seesaw and Schoology. Our support staff have shifted gears to handle all of the different schedule changes and needs of our students, not to mention the extensive cleaning and disinfecting that takes place daily. We very much appreciate how everyone has adjusted and remained optimistic each and every day for our students!

My passion is educating students, they are our primary purpose. I truly believe the best place for our students during this pandemic is in school. I feel we can help our families with community spread by keeping students in school and providing *A Quality Education for a Lifetime of Learning* as well as opportunities for continuous growth in a caring and belonging environment. Our Bobcat Wheel!

Parents who elect to apply and use our Hybrid Tier I as an option are supported. We desire for our students to remain in school and our staff to remain healthy! However, a stark reality exists if we begin to experience staff shortages due to COVID-19 or quarantine requirements. Substitutes are scarce and we may experience a situation whereby we ask parents to bring their students to school due to bus driver shortages or we notify parents that we are combining classes of students due to teacher shortages. Please understand that we are doing our best to combat COVID-related situations and remain open.

4. [COVID-19 School and Iowa Department of Public Health Guidance with Community Transmission](#)

The state created a table and [flowchart](#) summarizing the levels of community transmission. The formula for calculating the % Positivity 14-day average is the sum total of Individual Positive Cases (14 day) divided by the sum total of Total Individuals Tested (14 day).

So when you hear that Benton County is at a 15% positivity rate, this does not mean 15% of the total population of the school, our communities or the total population of Benton County. This percentage is taken from the people who tested positive out of the group of people who tested that day. Next, they average the daily percentages for a 14-day time period.

For example, if 100 people went to be tested today, and 15 tested positive for COVID-19, they would report 15%.

As of this week, the 14-day average has reached **18.7% positive COVID-19 cases in Benton County (11-5-20)** from the group of individuals who went to be tested.

The IDPH and Iowa Department of Education created this table to assist schools in making decisions about moving to Hybrid learning, temporary remote online learning, or “school closure” and moving all of our students to online learning.

[Return to Learn Plans - Tier I, Tier II, Tier III](#)

If we continue in the range of 15-20% Substantial Controlled over the past 14-days AND our student absenteeism for COVID-19 is 10% it may be necessary to move to 100% online or remote learning for a building or all of our school buildings. If this occurs, we would communicate quickly with our parents, staff and students and move forward with our Return to Learn Tier II, **Tier III**, or Required Continuous Learning plans. Tier II is using an alternate A/B day schedule for school (such as some students coming to school Monday and Tuesday, while others attend Thursday & Friday, and everyone is online Wednesday). While this plan would allow for fewer students in our buildings, it could be a difficult plan to implement within our currently designed schedule and bus routes. Our Tier III plan is to move most of our students to online remote learning for a designated period of time while having some of our special education students come into the building at designated times to receive instruction in-person. Our Required Continuous Learning model has all students learning online for a designated period of time. **Most likely, this is the plan we will use if illness and county COVID-19 rates necessitate. Please discuss with your family members and plan ahead if we are forced (due to COVID-19 situations) to move to Tier II, Tier III, or Required Continuous Learning.**



Return-to-Learn Plans

2020-2021

BRICK & MORTAR	In this model, students are provided educational services onsite in traditional brick & mortar locations. No at home learning is offered. This would be our ideal state in the absence of a pandemic.
HYBRID - TIER 1 <i>Beginning Aug. 24</i>	In this model, the majority of our students are learning at the brick & mortar locations. Due to health and safety concerns, families may choose to engage in remote learning experiences.
HYBRID - TIER 2	In this model, students would be placed in an A or B cohort to support a 50% capacity limit. Half of the students would be learning at the brick & mortar locations and half at home with live, online, and/or paper/pencil opportunities.
HYBRID - TIER 3	In this model, the majority of our students are learning at home. Specific student groups (IEP, ELL, etc) will be entering the brick & mortar setting. Students who do not attend in-person will have access to instruction through Seesaw/Schoology, Zoom, and/or materials/pick up.
REQUIRED CONTINUOUS LEARNING	In this model, all students are required to participate, attendance is taken, work is graded, and credit is granted. Instruction is provided through Seesaw/Schoology, Zoom, and/or materials/pick up.

4. Positive cases in Benton County

This website displays the day by day actual positive cases in our entire county:

<https://coronavirus.iowa.gov/pages/case-counts>

Our county population in Benton County is approximately 25,000 people using the census numbers from 2010.

The current positive rate for COVID-19 is **867** individuals.

Our county percentage as of today = **3.46%**

30% of the 830 individuals are ages 18-40. Another 33% are age 41-60. 12% are age 0-17.

Our data and state data show that fortunately, fewer school-age students are contracting COVID-19. However, we believe that continuing our mitigation efforts is valuable and helpful for everyone.

COVID-19 Parent Resources

- <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/children.html>
- [Caring for Children: Tips to keep children healthy while school's out](#) - Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
- [How to Select, Wear, and Clean Your Mask](#) - Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
- [Testing](#)