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PARENT NOTIFICATION November 24, 2020

Dear Parents,

We all continue to deal with the impact of COVID-19 on our families and in our community. The challenges we face are not ideal. None of us wants to be placed in these situations, but unfortunately we are all forced to deal with many variables outside our control. Unlike the Spring when much was unknown about the COVID-19 virus and few of us were personally impacted, we are now facing a more widespread impact not only on our community, but COVID-19 is starting to hit close to home for many of our families. Unfortunately, based on data and probability theory, the pattern of COVID-19 spread over the coming months will most likely continue if not increase.

Our goal throughout the pandemic was to base decisions on logic, and to openly communicate with students, parents and staff to the greatest extent possible. Decision-making was and will continue to put the best interest of our students and other stakeholders at the forefront. To be quite frank, this decision-making process has become quite difficult because of so many variables, most of which are outside of our control. Along the way, there have been students, parents and staff who were unhappy with the decisions we made. Unfortunately, we are living in unprecedented times for our generation and are doing the best we can. The pandemic conditions we are dealing with are not specific to Bear Creek, and communities across our nation – and the World – are dealing with the same challenges we are.

We have made the decision to continue with full remote/distance learning through January 4, 2021 at the earliest. We will evaluate the spread of COVID-19 after the holidays, at which time we will finalize a decision to either return to the hybrid-learning model (a mix of in-person instruction and distance learning), or extend the full remote-distance learning through January 15, 2021.

We considered many factors when making this decision, including but not limited to the following:

- Luzerne County, specifically the greater Wilkes-Barre area, has experienced a dramatic increase in positive COVID-19 cases over the past 30 days.
- The latest data from the Pennsylvania Department of Health indicates for the week ending November 20, 2020, Luzerne County is in the substantial level of community transmission. This is the 5th week that Luzerne County is in the substantial level. The county Incidence Rate per 100,000 Residents (Most Recent 7 Days) is 351.6 and the PCR Percent Positivity (Most Recent 7 Days) is 13.4%. The incidence rate per 100,000 residents increased from the previous 7-day reporting period to the most recent 7-day reporting period. The PCR percent positivity increased from the previous 7-day reporting period to the most recent 7-day reporting period.

- The Pennsylvania Department of Health and the Pennsylvania Department of Education recommends that all schools in areas with a “substantial level of community transmission” provide all remote/distance learning to students and cease in-person instruction.
- Public health experts expect the infection rate to continue to increase over the next few months.
- A group of our families, along with some of our staff, have currently tested positive for COVID-19 (some with Multi Inflammatory Syndrome) and are dealing with recovery.
- A significant number of families and staff members are planning to travel over the next 45 days, including out of state travel, while others anticipate welcoming out-of-town guests for holiday festivities. Many families and staff members are also planning to host or engage in holiday gatherings among individuals outside their household. All of these are high-risk activities that not only put the individuals involved at higher risk for infection, but also put those whom they come in contact with at risk – including others at school.
- State officials continue to provide guidance and new public health orders that cause confusion and mistrust among some citizens.
- There are many issues with COVID-19 testing, including difficulty acquiring a test, whether or not specific types of tests are accurate, when test results can be used to “clear” a person a to return to school or work, and conflicting nature of testing requirements (i.e. you must get a COVID test if travelling outside of the state for Thanksgiving but you don’t need a test to travel out of state for work).
- Some local, state and national testing sites/laboratories are reporting a shortage of COVID-19 tests, and because of increased testing demand, test results are being delayed.
- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention have changed their guidance as to the definition of “close contact”, which makes determining who to require to quarantine from school difficult.

We acknowledge that distance/remote learning presents many challenges for students, parents and staff. That is undeniable. That being said, the risks and challenges associated with keeping students and staff safe in a congregate setting within the physical school building are even greater.

We will continue to monitor the local rate of transmission, coordinate with state health officials, and engage in discussions regarding the next steps as it relates to our response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

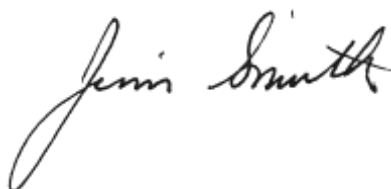
Any student or staff member who becomes ill or is exhibiting symptoms of COVID-19 over Winter Break (the period December 23, 2020 through January 3, 2021) is asked to contact Tina Vojtko at (570) 855-0118 before January 4th and should not come to school – please stay home if you are sick or exhibiting symptoms.

Students will be expected to follow the regular school calendar and schedule, and to log into Google Classroom daily and follow their modified schedule. Information regarding access to technology, along with web site links, logins and passwords was previously provided to all parents. If you have any questions about remote/distance learning, please contact your child’s teacher. Attendance will be taken at the start of each class. Students who are not present online or who are not actively participating in online instruction will be considered absent. Student engagement in the learning process will be graded.

We appreciate everyone's patience and support as we navigate these challenging times. There is hope on the horizon in the form of multiple COVID-19 vaccines, and there is no doubt we will make it through these challenging times.

In addition to wishing everyone a Happy Thanksgiving, I want to urge everyone to consider individual actions that impact the risk level associated with contracting and spreading COVID-19. I hope and pray that everyone stays safe and stays health during the upcoming holidays season.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jim Smith". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looping initial "J".

Jim Smith
Chief Executive Officer