



SUFFIELD PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Office of the Superintendent

Timothy M. Van Tassel
Superintendent

Laura Guerrette
Executive Secretary

October 6, 2020 COVID-19 Update

Dear Parents and Guardians,

The purpose of this notification is to provide an update to our Suffield families regarding our operational status for the month of October. I recognize the need to keep everyone informed as early and often as possible regarding the district's status so that our families can organize work schedules and arrange for childcare coverage as needed, which is why it is necessary to send this notification in hopes of alleviating these challenges as best as possible. Before providing the following update on our status as a district, I would like to, once again, reiterate my appreciation for your understanding, flexibility, and support for the decisions we have made as a district in prioritizing the health and safety of everyone within the Suffield community.

Over the past several weeks, the district has responded to several COVID-19 cases within our school district. In addition, our schools continue to address increasing numbers of COVID-19 exposures that are unrelated to students being in school. Fortunately, to-date we have not experienced any clusters of cases due to the vigilance of families who have taken the necessary precautions to prevent further spread of the virus. Families have taken it upon themselves to notify the district and other close contacts promptly – and for this, we can all be tremendously grateful. We encourage families to continue to remain steadfast in their approach as we all put forth tremendous effort as a community to keep everyone as safe as possible during the pandemic. Important to note in this correspondence, last week was the most challenging we have faced as a district since our reopening in August. The Suffield Public Schools had over 70 students and an additional 20 staff members who were under a 14-day quarantine due to COVID-19 exposures as of Friday afternoon. These numbers increased our student quarantines to 127 since our first day of school just five weeks ago. Although the emergence of new cases is concerning, there is something positive to note with regard to its impact. Due to the prompt notifications of families and the health and safety protocols we have taken as a district, we have been able to minimize school-based exposures while maintaining in-person learning for the vast majority of our students. I am very hopeful that this trend will continue within the Suffield Public Schools, and that we are able to afford our students the opportunity to experience teaching and learning within their classrooms throughout the 2020-2021 school year.

At last night's Board of Education meeting, I openly shared my concerns regarding the increasing numbers of Suffield exposures, our district versus county health metrics, and the issues the district has faced with having adequate coverage for staff who have been placed in quarantine. Further, I explained the increasing number of cases that Suffield has experienced over the past two weeks in comparison to other communities within the North Central District Health Department region. I then concluded my update to the Board by providing my perspective on the effectiveness of our

current hybrid model as an enabler of keeping our students and staff safe and in school while we address this uptick in COVID-19 related matters within the Suffield Public Schools. It is for these reasons, that I shared the importance of our schools remaining in our current hybrid model through the month of October. As noted in our discussion last evening, the Board understands the current circumstances we are in and remains committed to revisiting this discussion prior to the end of October in hopes of increasing in-person learning for November. Please note that we cannot commit to increasing in-person learning for November at this present time, but I assure you that we will consider this possibility if we are able to do so in the future.

In closing, I would like to say that I am truly sorry for the challenges our families are faced with by our delay in the full reopening of our schools. The impacts are significant and difficult, and I can only hope that the efforts of our country will move us closer to potential solutions that will bring our society and schools back to the normalcy that we are all hoping for. I thank you again for your understanding, and I am hopeful you are all able to remain in good health in the months ahead.

Sincerely,
Timothy M. Van Tassel, Superintendent