

# ONTEORA CENTRAL SCHOOL DISTRICT

BOICEVILLE, NEW YORK 12412

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Superintendent of Schools

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Subject: Important Information - Remote Learning

December 10, 2020

Dear Onteora Families,

Based on the continued increase in cases within our county and our communities, I have decided to continue in the remote learning environment through January 15th. This was not an easy decision and I do not take it lightly. I understand that this creates challenges for families and students. I want to bring our students back into our schools, but do not feel that this is the appropriate time to resume in person learning. I know that some families will support this decision and some will be frustrated, and I respect both of those viewpoints.

Last week, we were told that Ulster County could be designated as a yellow zone as per the Governor's micro cluster zone initiative as early as yesterday. This designation would require that school districts implement a testing protocol in order to maintain an in person learning model. The District would be required to test 20% of in person students and staff in each building within the designated zone. It would be possible, based on the current guidance, that after the first round of testing, if the positivity rate of the building is lower than the 7-day positivity rate within the zone, the school would no longer be required to continue testing. It is not mandatory to implement a testing protocol, but without it, a building that is within the designated zone may not return to in person learning.

There are a number of things that need to take place before we could contemplate implementing testing, and we are working with the UCDOH in order to determine if we would be able to consider a testing program. At this point, we do not have the tools necessary to even consider this strategy.

As you know, we cannot mandate testing, and would need consent from parents as well as staff. We may be reaching out to families in the near future to determine if testing would be supported by our families. Although it is not feasible to anticipate implementing a testing protocol at this time, both the Medical Director and I want to thoroughly understand what would be required, and if there is support from families and staff before recommending that we pursue a testing protocol.

Although we had planned to return to in-person learning next week it is anticipated that we might not be able to due to a potential designation as a yellow zone. Although we have met the metrics for that designation on a county level, the Governor's office has not made any additional designations in the past couple of weeks. Despite that, in the last three weeks, the Mid-Hudson region has seen a 148% hospitalization rate increase as per the Orange County DOH Commissioner. While children account for 8.3% of the total cases, this virus is completely new and although some symptoms are common among those suffering from the illness, the complete list of symptoms, as well as long term complications remain unknown. In fact, some children seem to be at risk for developing more severe complications from COVID-19, such as multi-system inflammatory syndrome in children (MIS-C), which is of great concern, especially for children who are medically fragile. For more information about MIS-C, please visit the following website:

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/children/mis-c.html>

While the in-schools transmission rate is low, we must continue to remember that schools are integral components of our community. The students, faculty and staff who are coming into our schools reside with others in households located within the community. The community rate of transmission is increasing consistently, and despite that the transmission of COVID-19 does not happen as much in school, the transmission that continues outside of school impacts the continuity of school operations. We have seen surrounding Districts switch back and forth between in person and remote learning on an ongoing basis. This is disruptive to families and our faculty and staff.

In discussion with the Board of Education at the meeting on Tuesday evening, we all agreed that we need to engage more with our community. We will begin hosting community meetings every other week so that our families can have another venue in which to gather information. This situation is changing continually, and this will be an opportunity for families to check in and receive updates on what is happening in the District. We will provide more information as soon as we have the details to share.

One of the concerns we continue to have for our families is related to the availability of food for our students. If you know of a family that is in need of support with food, or whose circumstances have changed, please encourage them to fill out the Meal Form that can be found on the District's website. If you are already receiving meals, you do not need to fill out this form again.

Thank you for your continued support during this pandemic. This is unlike any other situation we have faced, but I remain grateful for your partnership.

Sincerely,

Victoria McLaren  
Superintendent of Schools