

# ONTEORA CENTRAL SCHOOL DISTRICT

BOICEVILLE, NEW YORK 12412

**Victoria McLaren**  
Superintendent of Schools

(845) 657-6383  
Fax (845) 657-8742

January 14, 2020

Dear Onteora Families,

I know that everyone is anxious to plan regarding the potential return of our students to in person learning. Our original plan was to return on Tuesday of next week, following the observance of Martin Luther King Jr. Day. I shared with the Board of Education last night that we are going to stay in the remote learning environment until the beginning of the third quarter on February 1st.

We have had many discussions regarding our ability to bring our students back while following all of the guidelines and protocols required for operating an in person learning model. As you may recall, the guidance surrounding school closures has changed multiple times over the past six months, giving us all a sense of unease regarding what is being considered a safe environment. When we resumed instruction in September, our Testing and Contact Tracing Plan document that was created by the Ulster County Department of Health (UCDOH), indicated that "If any school in the District has three or more active cases at one time, involving more than one classroom, the school should close and work with the Ulster County Health Department's Rapid Response Team on mass testing of staff and students, subject to parent or guardian permission." Once we returned to in person learning in October, and the positivity rate in the county began to rise, the UCDOH amended the plan to include a different metric. The plan now states "If any school in the district has more than 3% of their census (staff, students and faculty) COVID-19 positive they are required to close and work with the UCDOH Rapid Response Team on mass testing of staff and students, subject to parent or guardian permission." For several of our buildings, 3% of those designated for in person learning is between three (3) and five (5) individuals. We currently have 11 Positive Cases and 5 presumptive positive cases within the District that cross four school buildings as well as Central Administration, the Transportation department, and the Facilities Department. We also have an additional 13 employees on quarantine. This number of individuals that are impacted by COVID-19 significantly impacts our ability to operate schools for in person learning. The numbers can also change significantly on a daily basis. In one day, we experienced an increase of 2 positive cases, 1 presumptive positive case and 1 additional quarantine. The fact that we have been operating in a fully remote learning environment indicates that the issues we had experienced before moving into the remote learning environment will only compound this situation. When operating in person, the required quarantines for those designated as contacts of positive and presumptive positive cases is often significant and very disruptive. We have experienced entire classrooms being required to quarantine due to exposure of presumptive positive cases.

We have also been recently informed that the metric that currently exists in the Testing and Contact Tracing Plan as provided by the UCDOH is no longer valid, and will be replaced by a metric that relies on the seven day rolling average positivity rate of the county. We do not yet

have any written guidance, but have been informed that if the seven day average county positivity rate is above 9%, all schools will be required to either operate in a fully remote model or commence with a testing protocol in order to return to in person learning. We are waiting for more specific guidance on this metric and are continuing to proceed with the steps necessary in order to determine if we would be able to support a testing protocol.

In addition to the concerns we have related to the metrics and the level of infection rates locally, the rollout of the vaccination initiative has also created issues for us in terms of ensuring we have appropriate supervision within the buildings. Last week, we began working directly with the Ulster County Deputy Executive with the intent of coordinating the scheduling of staff vaccinations as a cohort of Ulster County School Districts. It was a surprise to all of us when the state released the link to schedule appointments this week to all school staff on Sunday. This release without any notice or planning has resulted in our staff scheduling appointments for this week without being able to plan in an organized manner. We are absolutely in support of having as many staff as possible get vaccinated as it will hasten our return to some version of normal life, but this rollout was haphazard and disruptive. Some of our staff were able to schedule an appointment this week, but many were not. I anticipate that they will need to open appointments for the following week soon. Every individual that receives a vaccination will require an additional vaccination in twenty-eight days. Our biggest concern with this rollout is that, when we return to in person learning, we will have staff members that need to leave during the day in order to be vaccinated and this will only exacerbate the issues we have with staffing and supervision. Until we know the plan for the coming weeks and have a handle on the number of staff that will require coverage, it is impossible to know that we can safely reopen.

I want to thank you for your continued support and understanding as we navigate these challenging times. Please join The Communications Committee for the next COVID-19 Forum on Tuesday January 19, 2021, at 6:00pm. We will post the link on Facebook, Instagram, the website, and via Shout point.

Sincerely,  
Victoria McLaren  
Superintendent