

Whitehall-Coplay School District

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Dear Parents and Guardians,

December 18, 2020

Recently, the Whitehall Coplay School District was given the option by the PA Department of Education to remain open (conducting in person learning) while the county continues in the “Substantial level” of transmission of COVID-19. Like the majority of school districts in PA WCSD has chosen that option and signed an attestation that allows us to remain open, but only if we comply with health and safety mitigations and newly identified thresholds for confirmed COVID-19 cases within our school buildings.

Our district is committed to providing as much in person instruction as we can while providing a safe environment for all of our students and staff. We are diligently following our Health and Safety Plan to continue to provide a safe well structured environment for learning in all of our buildings. All students and staff continue to be required to follow the mask orders, self screen daily prior to coming to school, remain at 6ft social distancing to the maximum extent possible and we continue to follow identified cleaning protocols. Our nursing staff and our administration have been able to quickly identify positive COVID-19 cases, complete contact tracing and recommend quarantining (when appropriate) with the help of our parents and in consultation with the PA Department of Health.

As the number of positive cases in the Lehigh Valley and across the state continue to rise, so do the number of identified cases in our school district. It is important to note that our current data indicates that while there are rising cases in the community, because of the strong mitigation measures followed by the district, consistent with our Health and Safety Plan, our students and staff remain safe at school. We continue to monitor the cases in our district and have not seen significant spread to date in our schools.

During the past week you have received numerous notifications informing you of staff or students that have tested positive in the district. **For transparency our district notifications include all positive COVID-19 cases identified.** As seen in the past week many of the cases would **not qualify as confirmed COVID-19 cases in the district’s 14 day rolling average of positive cases** according to PA Department of Education's definition as listed below.

A COVID-19 confirmed case includes both confirmed and probable cases. The case count for a school building would include any individual (staff or student) with a confirmed or probable

case of COVID-19 who was physically present in the school setting while infectious (either 2 days before onset of symptoms or 2 days after a positive test in an asymptomatic person). Cases meeting the definition above would impact the school building's case count.

Below are the current thresholds for school closure as they relate to our district.

Buildings with 500-900 students (this includes Gockley, Steckel and Zephyr):

4-6 COVID-19 cases would require a 3-7 day closure

7+ cases would require 14-day closure

Buildings with more than 900 students (this includes Whitehall-Coplay Middle School and Whitehall High School) :

6-10 COVID-19 cases would require a 3-7 day closure

11+ would require 14-day closure

In all cases stated above, if case investigations, contact tracing and cleaning and disinfecting can be accomplished in a faster timeframe, the length of closure time may be shortened. The closure determination is made in consultation with the Department of Health.

In Whitehall, the indicators above are some examples of the many factors we must consider to maintain in-person instruction. The health and safety of our staff and students remains our top priority. **The amount of staff quarantining or sick may force a school closure simply because we don't have enough staff on-hand to keep a building open safely. Currently this is one of our biggest concerns. There is a vast substitute shortage across the state, and Whitehall is challenged by this shortage as well. We all must continue to prepare contingency plans for a possible pivot to remote learning and remain as resilient and flexible as possible.**

Additionally, the Governor has issued an updated order calling for more restrictions over the next several weeks. All district athletic and extracurricular activities are currently suspended and are scheduled to resume on Monday, January 4th in compliance with this order.

With regard to attendance...The pandemic has and will continue to post challenges to student's regular attendance. In Pennsylvania, students who miss more than 10 percent of school days across the academic year are considered chronically absent. Students' habitually missing school may be considered truant and be referred to the local magistrate.

The Whitehall Coplay School District wants to assist in your child(ren)'s success but we need your support in helping your child get to school each day on time or logged in so they may reach his or her full potential.

Please make note that during this time of blended and remote learning, instruction and growth will continue. We want to ensure that your child is engaged Monday through Friday. Each day, regardless of whether your child is following the blended or learn at home model, they are expected to log into their Google Classroom or Seesaw accounts and complete all assignments. If your child should have questions or concerns, we would encourage them to reach out to their teachers directly for assistance.

The Whitehall-Coplay School District, an equal opportunity employer, will not discriminate in employment, educational programs or activities, based on race, sex, handicap or because a person is a disabled veteran or a veteran of the Vietnam Era. This policy of non-discrimination extends to all other legally protected classifications. Publication of this policy in this document is in accordance with State and Federal laws including Title IX of the Educational Amendments of 1972 Sections 503 and 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and Title VI and VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. We further affirm that all curriculum offerings and student enrollment practices will be handled without discrimination based on sex, race, religion, national origin, or non-job related handicaps or disabilities.

Please see the links below, which provide advice on how best to help your child build the habit of good attendance.

[Help Your Child Succeed in Elementary School](#)

[Keep Your Teen on Track in Middle and High School](#)

In closing, I would like to thank all of our staff, students and parents for continuing to adhere to the health and safety measures we have put in place and continue to remain flexible and supportive as we try to navigate the COVID 19 pandemic.

Sincerely,

Lorie Hackett

Superintendent of Schools