

Lancaster Central School District

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Michael J. Vallely, Ph.D.
Superintendent of Schools

November 11, 2020

Dear Lancaster Families,

I have said it several times since September 8th, it has been a tremendous lift and undertaking to get this large district reopened. I am very, very proud of where we are today, on this 45th day of being reopened. An amount of days in session that I honestly didn't think we would achieve. Things are different, for sure, but the good, caring people of this district continue to stay true to our mission and to battle through the obstacles the pandemic and others have placed in front of us. No matter what the future brings, each and every day we will strive to provide not only the excellence in education that this community has come to expect, but to do our best to adapt our methods and techniques to take care of our Lancaster children.

Our students, faculty and staff have diligently followed our health and safety protocols to mitigate the spread of COVID-19. To date, we have no evidence of any spread within any of our schools. Our planning and mitigation strategies have worked. But, despite everyone's best efforts, the rising community spread of the virus is threatening our hybrid instructional model here in Lancaster. The rate of COVID-19 infection is increasing rapidly throughout Erie County. Several weeks ago, Governor Cuomo announced a new color-coded strategy of monitoring and responding to outbreaks of new cases within a limited and definable geographic area, which are called "micro-clusters." The Governor's office worked with Erie County this past weekend to identify micro-clusters within Western New York and yesterday, most of Erie county including all six of Lancaster CSD zip codes were placed in Governor Cuomo's yellow zone.

According to the governor's plan, once designated a yellow zone micro-cluster, the district may remain open to in-person instruction, however, we would need to randomly identify and test 20% of our students and staff (1,200 tests per week) each week until the data points in Erie County and Lancaster drop below the yellow zone levels. If we cannot meet these testing parameters, we must transition to fully remote instruction. If infection rates go up in the next couple days and we are placed into orange or red zones, the Governor would force us to pivot to remote instruction immediately.

This summer, the Erie County Department of Health (ECDOH) informed districts that any necessary testing would be handled by them. As recently as last week, they continued that clear message of support to local school districts. But, despite what was previously promised, ECDOH four days ago advised us that they will not be able to assist school districts with these random testing requirements. In Lancaster, we are not giving up. We are currently working through the details and the process to become a testing site. If we cannot become a test site relatively quickly or if we cannot physically perform 1,200 tests in a week, we will then have to transition to fully remote instruction. I feel at this time; the deck is stacked against us.

This letter is not an announcement of a shift to fully remote instruction, but I felt it very important to provide you with insight so that you may begin considering the potential implications at home. Lancaster families need to be prepared to transition to remote instruction and create plans for child care, possibly in the very near future. Should we be forced to make a transition to fully remote instruction, we would be forced to stay in the remote model until such designation is lifted by the Governor. We have been working on a plan for a smooth transition to fully remote instruction that allows us to remain as consistent as possible. The plan will be shared in the next few days. Please know that returning to hybrid in-person instruction will remain our primary objective and we will immediately shift our efforts to do what is necessary to make that happen as soon as possible.

For families that may need additional childcare support, please visit our website. Click on COVID-19 & Reopening and under Announcements, click the [Virtual Learning Support Centers](#). This program is a partnership between local school districts and the county.

Thank you for your patience and understanding as we continue to navigate and adjust to the ongoing pandemic. Mask up, social distance, sacrifice for others, and stay safe!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Michael J. Vallely". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'M'.

Michael J. Vallely, Ph.D.
Superintendent of Schools