

South Lewis Central School District

Mr. Douglas Premo, Superintendent

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April 21, 2021

Dear South Lewis School Community:

As communicated last week, our review of the recently revised and released guidance from the Center for Disease Control (CDC) and the New York State Department of Health (NYSDOH) regarding in-person instruction has been on-going. The updated CDC and NYSDOH documents can be found at:

- <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/operation-strategy.html>
- https://www.governor.ny.gov/sites/default/files/atoms/files/Pre-K_to_Grade_12_Schools_MasterGuidance.pdf

Unfortunately, this guidance has not provided us with the needed flexibility to return all students to in-person instruction at all levels. Primarily, this is due to Lewis County being designated as a “High Risk” COVID-19 transmission community due to our total new cases per 100,000 persons over a seven-day rolling average. This “High Risk” designation puts restrictions on the re-opening of schools that schools in “Low”, “Moderate”, or “Substantial Risk” zones do not have. This CDC Data Tracker Map can be found at:

- <https://covid.cdc.gov/covid-data-tracker/#county-view>

Specifically, this “High Risk” designation will only allow us to consider reducing physical distancing requirements if we can “cohort” all students. “Cohorting” students requires all students remain self-contained in the same classroom with the same group of students for the entire day. Elementary schools are inherently set up in this manner as each classroom is basically its own “cohort.” However, at the Middle-High School level our students have very different, and often individualized, educational plans and schedules that require them to switch classes and mix among many other students. Therefore, Middle-High school cohorts are not feasible or practicable.

It is for this very simple fact and reality, that at this time we can only consider returning to full-time in-person instruction at the Glenfield and Port Leyden Elementary schools. However, even returning our youngest learners to full-time regular instruction will have many challenges. **For example, schools are allowed to reduce physical distancing from six-feet to three-feet if they follow several other conditions which include:**

- **Three-feet of physical distancing is only allowable in classrooms**
 - Face Masks must be worn at **ALL** times
- **Six-feet of physical distancing is still required at all other times including on buses, in the hallways and other common areas, during Physical Education, conducting activities that project the voice such as singing, and when eating snacks, breakfast, lunch or drinking**
- **Six-feet of physical distancing is required between adults and between adults and students at all times**
- **A face mask must be worn at **ALL** times throughout the course of the day**
- **Masks can only be removed during scheduled mask breaks where six-feet of physical distancing must be maintained**
- **Masks must be two-ply**

It is also important to note that the use of physical barriers, such as face shields and plastic partitions, is no longer considered a mitigation method that will allow for reducing physical distancing requirements. Lastly, it is also helpful to be aware that all current quarantine guidelines remain the same and did not/will not change with any reductions to three-feet of physical distancing.

For all of these reasons we will continue with our current instructional model for our Middle-High School students.

However, we can consider returning Glenfield and Port Leyden Elementary students to full-time in-person instruction. In helping the District to make the decision if this is in the best interests of our students, parents, faculty/staff and overall school community, we are seeking feedback.

We are specifically seeking this feedback only from those that would be impacted by the change at the Glenfield and Port Leyden Elementary Schools. **There will be a separate survey for the parents/guardians of our elementary students and for our elementary faculty and staff. These online surveys will be open through Sunday, April 25th.** They can be accessed on our school district website homepage. Additionally, a Peachjar flyer will be sent with a link to the surveys.

Please be sure to carefully read the leading or forward information on each survey. That key information, which most of but not all is included in this letter, will identify the many factors that must be considered when providing feedback regarding a return to full-time in-person instruction for our Glenfield and Port Leyden Elementary students.

The District will review the information provided from these surveys beginning on Monday, April 26th. This information will help to inform us as decisions are made regarding changes to our instructional model at the elementary level, if any. Should any changes in the elementary instructional model take place, it will begin approximately the week of May 10th.

The safety and well-being of our students, staff, and school community remain a priority. We appreciate your continued support and understanding as we continue to navigate education during this COVID-19 pandemic and health emergency. Be well and stay safe.

Sincerely,



Douglas Premo
Superintendent of Schools