



## Bedford Area School District Update: August 11, 2020

The Bedford Area School District appreciates the support of the students, parents, and community during this rapidly changing situation. We value your patience and understanding as we strive to create the best educational situation while focusing on the safety of students, staff, and ultimately the community. To the many who have told us, we recognize the difficulty of this situation, thank you!

In the last Q/A, the district reiterated its desire to be frank with the community about the reopening of schools to include the decision making process and the incredible complexity of the situation. Honesty and frankness will always be our goal. Since our last Q/A, we continued to monitor Federal and State announcements and guidelines. We see the State holding firmly to limiting group sizes, wearing masks, and a general concern for the spread of the virus. We observed schools in other states attempt complete reopening resulting in positive Covid test results and quarantines. Unfortunately, our tabletop drills showed the same potential outcomes if we attempted a complete reopening at the Bedford Area School District. We continue to see colleges move to virtual options and many college sports conferences suspend their sports programs until the Spring. We are currently monitoring the PIAA and the Governor Office as they make decisions about Fall sports. While the current decision is to delay the opening of Fall sports across Pennsylvania, it is very likely this may change in the near future. Finally, we had a couple suspicious cases that offered us greater insight into contact tracing and how quickly positive cases can disrupt in our education system.

Given the negative trend line and lack of clarity at the Federal and State level, it is imperative the Bedford Area School District select the plan that provides the best educational opportunity and provides a high-level of safety. Therefore, **effective August 10, 2020, the Bedford Area School District will reopen under the Alternative Plan** as described below.

### **What is the Alternative Schedule?**

The Bedford Area School District will use an alternative schedule to limit the number of students during the school day and promote social distancing. Under this option 50% of the students will attend school physically for one week every other week. When students are not physically attending school, they will complete their work virtually.

### **What are the advantages of the alternative schedule?**

There are numerous advantages to the alternative schedule. With less students physically attending school, we can socially distance students both mitigating the spread of the virus and

allowing students to remove their masks for large portions of the day. Additionally by lowering the number of students, our student-to-teacher physical ratio will decrease allowing staff to better supervise hygiene and social distancing. Also, the alternative schedule offers a built-in 9-day quarantine period, which may be necessary if we experience a surge in Covid cases.

### **How will I know when my children will attend school?**

The district will assign students to attend school based on the youngest member of the family's last name so all members of the family will attend school during the same week allowing older siblings to help as babysitters. For example, if your first grader's last name is Adams but your 11<sup>th</sup> grader's last name is Zeller, your entire family will attend with the first part of the alphabet. We recognize there may be special cases requiring flexibility. Please contact your building administration to resolve those situations.

### **Will the school building publish lists of when students should attend school?**

Yes. In an effort to create a double check for families, we will publish a list of students and the week they should attend school physically. Published lists will be available on each building's website by 2:00p.m. Wednesday, August 12, 2020.

### **Will the virtual education be similar to last year?**

We will use similar technology, but students will experience increased expectations. Last spring came quickly and required considerable flexibility especially since students never returned to school. This Fall we have (a) decreased the number of classes allowing students to focus deeper on fewer subjects, (b) have regular physical classes allowing one-to-one instruction and remediation if necessary, and (c) will provide both review and new materials during the virtual week in an effort to cover all course content. Students should expect a rigorous and relevant education.

## **Transportation**

### **Will the busses operate as normal?**

Yes. The busses will follow a similar route and arrive at approximately the same time.

**Will there be special seating on the busses?**

Yes. We are directing bus drivers to seat students in family groups and to provide separation between the groups. For the majority of our bus routes, this seating arrangement will allow students to remove masks and help to limit potential spread of the Covid virus.

**Can I drive my child?**

Yes. Upon arrival please follow the building's drop-off procedures.

**District Plan to Respond to Cases of Covid-19**

The district constantly plans for the safety of students and staff, and in this case, for the community. The district engaged in several tabletop drills, developed procedures and forms for contact tracing, developed building and district teams, and unfortunately learned from several suspected Covid cases. Our goal is to quickly identify potential cases, identify potential spread, and quarantine in an effort to mitigate the spread of the virus.

**How will the district contact trace?**

If the district receives a positive case (an individual with a positive test result), we will systematically investigate every location visited by the individual beginning with the bus ride to school and ending with the bus ride home. For example, siblings will most likely be close contacts. A close contact is an individual who had contact with a positive individual for more than 15 minutes with or without a mask and closer than 6ft. Siblings and any other individuals meeting the close contact definition will quarantine. The district will formally contact any close contacts and coordinate the plan for their return.

**How will the district handle suspicious cases?**

During our planning and drills, we identified three additional categories of individuals. Individuals with suspicious symptoms will be asked to quarantine until they receive a Covid test or the symptoms resolve. Individuals who have close contact with an individual with suspicious symptoms may be asked to quarantine depending on their exposure. The last group is contact of a close contact. Frankly, everyone during the Covid pandemic should consider themselves a contact of a close contact and closely monitor themselves for potential symptoms. The district will provide ongoing education for all students and staff.

# Athletics

Currently, the status of athletics is rapidly changing. The Governor recently recommended suspending Fall sports. In reaction to the Governor's announcement, the PIAA delayed the start of Fall sports. We suspect there will be future changes.

## **What is the current status of fall sports?**

A) Spectators are still not permitted at sporting events per the PIAA. Schools who violate these rules may be subject to forfeits and cancelations of events.

B) There are no official practices until August 24th. The PIAA is permitting voluntary summer workouts until the start of official practices.

C) Here are some additional important dates:

- Heat acclimation for football will begin August 24<sup>th</sup>.
- Golf matches can begin August 27<sup>th</sup>.
- Tennis matches can begin August 31<sup>st</sup>.
- All other sports can begin competitions on September 11<sup>th</sup>.

\*\* The athletic department is developing new competition schedules and will post them on our website when finished. Again, there is a high potential of future changes.

## **2020-21 BACK TO SCHOOL FAQ'S**

We write you today during very unusual times. District officials are listening closely to the community and we recognize the diverse and often emotional perspectives. Generally, we find there are three groups: the complete reopening group, the five days on five days off group, and the virtual option group. We recognize there is not one clear solution for all. Given this situation, we appreciate one reoccurring theme, which often emerges about half-way through all our conversations, there isn't one right answer and in the end, there is going to be someone who is disappointed. We are trying our best.

As school and community leaders, we always strive to be transparent in our communications. To that end, this communication will be transparent and in some topics, frankly not popular with some. We believe frankness is the path forward given the uncertainty of this situation so individual families can begin to make decisions for the opening of school.

We offer the following question and answer to help parents understand the current situation, provide information about options, offer information about procedures under the options, and give current information about the fall sports season.

### **Current Situation:**

Is there a clear message about opening schools?

Absolutely not. In fact, we usually spend the first fifteen minutes or more of each day reading about the recent revisions and/or mixed messages. For example, we know many college sports conferences delayed their fall seasons while the PIAA continues to move forward with sports. We know some universities are opening while others are virtual. Recently, we witnessed the start of professional baseball and then a quick outbreak.

Given the mixed messages, what information is the Bedford Area School District using to make decisions?

We review information from numerous sources while looking at some key information when making decisions. We listen to Federal and State guidelines and mandates. Currently, the Governor seems to prefer individual local decisions rather than a state-wide approach. Additionally, we look for trends in an effort to better understand the potential realities of our current options. For example, we are monitoring the openings of other school districts and universities. We watch the success of summer athletics at other schools, especially with similar demographics to our community. We are aware Covid-19 has impacted several high school athletic teams during summer practices, so we fully expect case(s) of Covid-19 will occur in our district at some point. Given this information, we are monitoring the PIAA closely to see if they follow the direction of other states or stay the current course. Finally, we review local Covid-19 data and listen to our community.

Can the District make its own rules?

Yes and no. The Bedford Area School District has the legal authority to create rules as long as they do not conflict with federal and state laws. We offer this point because like many of our constituents, we like to blaze our own path. As a school district, we do not have the freedom to ignore federal and state laws, mandates, and/or orders. Therefore, we can't simply say we are not going to enforce a particular order, i.e. masks or group sizes at sporting events.

Given the fluid situation, when will parents know if the district chooses a different option?

Our current option is a complete reopening. We will communicate a change in options as soon as possible. If the change occurs too close to the beginning of school, we may delay the start of school to give parents the opportunity to adjust their plans. At this time, we ask parents to make contingency plans for all options just in case a change occurs.

## **The District's Options for Reopening**

### Complete Reopening

The Bedford Area School District will completely reopen every day for all students. **As of July 21, 2020, the district plans to completely reopen.** Please note, given the current executive order students will wear masks where we cannot socially distance them. It is also important to note social distance is difficult given the limitations of our physical space in classes and busses. We will use a modified schedule to limit the number of classes offered to students during a semester. For example, many students will take four classes per semester rather than 8 classes. This approach promotes rigor if we are required to move to an alternative schedule or complete virtual. Additionally, the modified schedule eliminates approximately 50% of student movement throughout the school day.

### Alternative Schedule

The Bedford Area School District may be forced to use an alternative schedule to limit the number of students during the school day and promote social distancing. If the district elects this option, 50% of the students will attend school physically for one week every other week. When students are not physically attending school, they will complete their work virtually. The district will assign students to attend school based on the youngest member of the family's last name so all members of the family will attend school at the same time allowing older siblings to help as babysitters. For example, if your first grader's last name is Adams but your 11<sup>th</sup> grader's last name is Zeller, your entire family will attend with the first part of the alphabet. Please know, we ensure you we will provide plenty of information and publish lists to eliminate any confusion.

Why the district would chose the alternative option?

This option allows the district to divide the school population in half. With fewer students attending physically, the district can provide greater physical distance between students in all areas including busses, classes, and cafeteria. This option should limit exposure and allow greater physical distancing during large portions of the day.

Virtual Opening

The Bedford Area School District may be forced to go virtual if we cannot physically open. This will be very similar to the end of last school year. One difference is the modified schedule, which will allow more rigor, and since students have more experience under this model, we will require an effort from students similar to when they physically attend.

Why the district would chose the virtual option?

The district would chose this option if we see the community's Covid case rate increase significantly or if we experience several cases and numerous exposures of Covid-19 at school. Additionally, the district may also be forced to this option by the state at any point.

Delayed Start

The Bedford Area School District may consider delaying the decision to reopen to gather more information rather than begin with one option and be forced to quickly move to another. For example, if it becomes apparent the Governor may make a decision to close schools in close proximity to our beginning of the school year, we may elect to delay our opening a few days to allow the situation to unfold.

Existing Virtual Program

Does the district offer an option not bound to the current situation?

Yes, the district offers our existing virtual program. We realize some parents may be uncomfortable with any of these options and/or simply want firm plans now for the fall. The one firm plan we can offer parents is our pre-existing virtual program. The district has operated a virtual program for over twelve years and has graduated numerous students with a Bedford Area School District Diploma. We offer the program to any family and ask you to contact us early so we can work collaboratively to develop the best program for your children. Please contact your building principal or assistant principal to discuss this option. FOR MORE INFORMATION : <https://www.bedfordasd.org/bedford-online-options>

Can I change to or from our existing virtual program during the school year?

Yes. Given the current situation, the district will work closely with parents and we completely understand the situation. Again, we recommend speaking with your building administration early to develop a plan.

## **Description of General Procedures**

In this section, we offer information about a variety of topics such as personal protective equipment, changes to school operations, cleaning, and health-related subjects.

### **Personal Protection Equipment**

Will students wear face coverings?

Yes, the district will ask students to wear face coverings, which cover the nose and mouth, when they are not physically separated 6 ft. or more and when directed by staff.

Will the district provide face coverings?

The district purchased a washable cloth face covering for all students. Additionally, we are stock piling a large quantity of disposable face coverings to distribute as needed. Parents can also supply school appropriate face masks, which cover the nose and mouth.

Will the district offer students an alternative face covering?

We are purchasing alternative face covering such as shields and will consider requests to use this alternative. Please contact your building administration to discuss this option.

Will teachers and district employees wear face coverings?

Yes, they will follow the same guidelines as students. Many teachers are electing to wear face shields rather than masks. Additionally, we know many parents prefer shields to masks to help students hear well.

Is the district installing physical barriers?

Yes, we installed some physical barriers to protect students and staff in high traffic areas such as school offices.

Will the district provide hand sanitizer for students?

Yes. All classrooms will have hand sanitizer for students and staff.

## **Potential Changes to School Operations**

Will students have recess?

Yes, but it may look different. The elementary leadership is currently exploring alternative formats for recess. They are currently considering more recesses and structured recesses. An example of a structured recess is a four-square tournament with appropriate distancing. In this format, students can play outside while physically distancing thus allowing students a break from wearing mask.

Will the class structure change?

Yes. We are making several changes to the class structure. First, we are using a modified schedule to decrease movement and the overall number of classes during each semester at the high school and middle school. At the elementary school, most extracurricular teachers will move to the students. Additionally, we will use all available space including outside areas to physically separate students.

Will students arrive and dismiss differently?

Yes. Your building principal will provide updated information about arrival and dismissal plans for individual buildings. For example, some buildings are having students report directly to class rather than go to the cafeteria and/or lockers. The actual arrival and dismissal times will not change, only the procedures will change.

Does the district have plans to deal with increases in parents driving children to school?

Yes. The district recognizes many parents may elect to drive their children to school given the close proximity of bus seating. Your building administration will communicate information about dropping off and picking up students.

Please note: We will continue to provide updates regarding school operations either via a district-wide question and answer or via your building administration.

## **Cleaning**

Does the district have a plan to increase cleaning?

Yes. Please know the district has past experiences dealing with infectious diseases. We are working with our suppliers and specialists to ensure we use the appropriate cleaning agents and techniques to clean all student areas every evening. Additionally, we are distributing cleaning supplies for periodic use throughout the day.

What special techniques is the district using to clean rooms?

We invested heavily in modern technology to upgrade and expand our approach to cleaning. We purchased additional misters to mass treat rooms. Additionally, we purchased UV lights to sanitize student spaces and equipment. We will continue to invest in technology to help us maximize cleaning.

Will the district increase the cleaning of school busses?

The district will work with school bus contractors to ensure school busses are cleaned regularly with the appropriate cleaning agents and techniques.

## Health-Related Topics

Will the district monitor students for symptoms?

The district is providing professional development to all staff members about the symptoms of Covid-19. If we observe a student with symptoms, we will ask the nurse to review the potential symptoms with the parents. Additionally, we are asking parents to help mitigate a potential exposure by not sending children with symptoms to school.

What symptoms should parents look for in their children?

The school nurses are working hard this summer to help parents during the pandemic. They offer the following guidelines:

# COVID –19 Symptoms

## Screening and Monitoring

Group A (1 or more symptoms)	Group B (2 or more symptoms)
Fever (100.0 or higher)	Sore throat
Cough	Runny nose/congestion
Shortness of breath	Chills
Difficulty breathing	Lack of smell or taste (new)
	Muscle pain
	Nausea/vomiting
	Headache

Stay home or be sent home if:

If employee or student has 1 or more symptoms in Group A

If employee or student has 2 or more symptoms in Group B

If the employee or student is taking fever reducing medication

**\*\*MONITORING OF SYMPTOMS SHOULD BE DONE DAILY BEFORE COMING TO SCHOOL**

Does the school district have a plan to respond to a Covid-19 case or potential exposure?

Yes. In addition to working with the health department, the district developed robust procedures for contact tracing. We recognize Covid can spread quickly and realize it is imperative we isolate not only the individual who tested positive, but also any close contacts. The district will work closely with parents and staff to activate a quarantine and develop a return plan based on the individual situation.

Has the district engaged in contact tracing drills?

Yes. Our drills exposed one positive case could potentially cause numerous students and staff to quickly enter into a quarantine in an effort to mitigate any potential spread.

What if my child misses school due to illness or mandated quarantine?

The district always works closely with parents when students are ill. If your child becomes ill, please contact your building administration to develop an appropriate educational plan for your child.

## **Athletics**

Is the district planning to have athletics in the fall?

While schools districts have individual teams, sports competitions are governed by the PIAA. Currently, the PIAA is moving forward with the fall season. Please know, the PIAA could change direction at any time effectively suspending or canceling the fall season.

Will spectators be permitted to attend the sporting events?

Currently, no. The district received notice from the Pennsylvania Department of Health that the indoor and outdoor group size limitations apply to sporting events. The group size for indoor competition is 25 and 250 for outdoor competition. The district must first count athletes and coaches before considering additional spectators. For example, in the case of a football game, the district must first count football players (100 students between each team) and coaches (20 adults between each team), 7 officials, 3 members of the chain crew, band (80 students for the home band) and advisors (2 adults for the home band), and cheerleaders (40 students between each squad) and advisors (6 adults between each squad) before considering any additional community members. Unfortunately, the district is currently exploring how to handle the number of athletes dressing for competitions when team size alone will exceed the group size limitations.

Will the district broadcast sporting events?

The district is developing plans to broadcast select sporting events and will provide more information about this option including a potential schedule of events in the future.