

The Northern Bedford County School District is disheartened to inform our parents and community that our State Government has, once again, changed requirements for the reopening of schools. The latest change requires face coverings at all times while at school. While we certainly believe in doing our part with the COVID virus, our frustration comes from the lack of planning, strategic thinking, and use of data by our State leaders. We firmly believe many topics in the recently issued guidelines were predictable and the State should have planned for this reality earlier than two days before most schools were set to reopen. We believe this pattern will continue in other areas such as the fall sports season. Northern Bedford continues to consider the options to the current plan in this ever-changing environment to provide the best opportunity for education possible under these circumstances. At this time, NBC is continuing with a hybrid schedule due to the continued mandate of 6 feet. The hybrid model will allow teachers to provide “mask breaks” throughout the day as needed at 10 minute intervals. Again, NBC will continue to monitor the results from surrounding schools and the information provided by the Dept. of Health to make appropriate adjustments to the school schedule. Below is a timeline of information provided to districts.

On June 3, school districts were provided preliminary guidance for Pennsylvania Dept. of Education (PDE) for the reopening of schools. Districts were to develop a Health and Safety Plan that reflect local needs and would serve as the local guidelines for all school reopening activities. It was to be approved by the local school board and submitted to PDE. Activities may begin as early as July 1. Prior to the NBC June 16 board meeting, guidance came out that sports activities could resume prior to July 1 as long as the Health and Safety Plan for sports had been approved by the board and posted. The plan was approved at the June 16 board meeting and posted on the website as required.

On July 1, the Pennsylvania Dept. of Health (PaDOH) issued an order for face coverings to be worn while outside when unable to maintain 6 feet and in all public places. On July 6, the DOH sent clarifying information for schools stating in part that face coverings were not required in school for students when 6 feet distancing was able to be maintained. The clarification also stated that coaches, athletes, and spectators must wear face coverings unless outdoors and can consistently maintain social distancing of at least six feet; however, athletes must wear face coverings when on the sidelines, in the dugout, etc. **AND** anytime 6 feet social distancing is not possible.

On July 15, Gov. Wolf ordered new mandates limiting gatherings indoors to 25 and outdoors to 250 people. The order did not apply to classroom settings, but does apply to school activities outside of the classroom that are not related to educational instruction. School activities and gatherings not related to educational instruction that are held **indoors** are limited to no more than 25 people. This includes meetings, assemblies, etc. Activities and gatherings held **outdoors** are limited to no more than 250 people.

Throughout the latter part of June and July, school districts worked very hard on an appropriate and responsible plan for the opening of sports. On August 5, PDE requested information from all school districts on their plans for reopening. This was to be provided to the governor at a meeting later that day. On August 6, the breakdown of school reopening decisions across the State were as follows: Total

reopen for all students 179, Scaffolded opening 57, Hybrid 159, Total remote 62, and Undecided 22. Also on August 6 at a press conference, Gov. Wolf strongly recommended the postponement of K-12 sports until January 1, 2021 (which is in the middle of the winter sports season). Caught by surprise with this announcement, PIAA decided to approve a 2-week pause for sports with the goal to have dialogue with the governor on the continuation of sports.

On August 10, PDE distributed recommendations on method of returning to school on a countywide basis relying on 2 standard public health metrics: Incidence Rate and the Percent Positivity of diagnostic testing. This “recommendation” placed Bedford County in the hybrid model for return to school. Depending on the results of the 7-day period, districts could go full face to face, hybrid, or full online.

On August 17, PDE sent an email at 2:22 PM stating that face coverings were required to be worn by all students at all times while in school, even when 6 feet of social distancing can be achieved. However, “mask breaks” are acceptable. These breaks can be no more than 10 minutes in length, but are not limited in frequency. As demonstrated throughout this document, this may change at a later date.

Although the Governor, PDE, and PaDOH routinely claim school reopening is a local decision, they continually make recommendations that limit each school district’s ability to actually make local decisions. None of the “recommendations” from Harrisburg feel like recommendations, but are designed to force districts on a path desired by the governor without an actual mandate.

On August 17, Rep. Topper posted on his FB page that the DOH has no records of any data used by the governor to make his recommendation to cancel school sports.