

# Marcellus Central Schools

2 Reed Parkway  
Marcellus, NY 13108  
(315) 673-6000

**Jean Sharlow**  
*Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum,  
Instruction, Data & Assessment*

**Michelle. L. Brantner**  
*Superintendent of Schools*

**Anthony Sonnacchio**  
*School Business  
Administrator*

---

October 16, 2020

Dear Mustang Families:

It is my hope that this letter finds you all doing well. We continue to be living through such crazy times. I feel very fortunate to be surrounded by such a supporting community. As you know, we have survived our first positive case of COVID 19 while school is in session. It was a true learning experience for all of us. I wanted to provide you with updates on a few topics.

## **Return to School After Illness**

We are working very hard to follow the New York State Department of Health (NYSDOH) guidelines and recognize that it poses some challenges for our families. We are grateful for your patience and support during these very challenging times. That being said, as a reminder, students must stay home if they are exhibiting any symptoms that could be attributed to COVID 19. When a student is sent home ill or is absent due to illness, your first step is to contact your child's health care provider. If your child's health care provider gives a diagnosis of a *known chronic condition with unchanged symptoms*, or a *confirmed (through medical testing) acute illness (examples: laboratory-confirmed influenza, strep-throat)* AND COVID-19 is NOT suspected, then a note signed by their health care provider explaining the alternate diagnosis is required for your child to return to school. According to the NYSDOH guidance, a note from the health care provider documenting unconfirmed acute illnesses, such as viral upper respiratory illness (URI) or viral gastroenteritis, can not be accepted and the student will need to get COVID testing. The reasoning here is that if you can't definitively rule out COVID 19, having a test is the safest course of action. We have all seen the domino effect of one positive case in a school district. Following these guidelines won't eliminate the chance of dealing with a positive case, but will greatly diminish the spread.

Please understand that we are mandated to follow this NYSDOH guidance and it is not a choice. We have included a one page graphic on the 'return to school' protocol for your reference. We will continue to work closely with health care providers in the area to improve dialogue and collaboration.

## **Issues with School Messenger Phone Calls**

After dealing with our recent positive COVID 19 case in the district, I received some feedback that some people are experiencing issues with receiving school messenger robo calls. The issues occur when answering the phone, the message begins with my typical greeting, "Hello this is Mrs. Brantner...." and suddenly cuts off and begins again. We contacted the company and they shared their explanation for this occurrence. There appear to be certain tones/sounds that trigger a restart of the message. Some of those tones can be the result of background noise or inadvertently pressing a button on the phone while it is playing. If you have experienced this never ending loop of my greeting, it may be easier for you to let it go to voicemail and listen to the message that way. In addition, I have been trying to post all of my messages to the COVID page of the website as a backup for people; so, feel free to check there. If you continue to have issues, please let us know so that we can do further investigation.

### **Dealing with Positive Cases:**

Now that we have a little experience with a positive case, I wanted to share how the steps of the process work so that you have a better idea if and when it occurs again. It begins with either a call from the health department or from the infected individual/family to the school district. In the event that the health department was not the one to call us first, we contact them directly and may have to provide them with documentation of the positive case from a lab. They can/will not begin their processes without paperwork confirming the positive test. In the meantime, we begin collecting extensive contact tracing information to include name, date of birth, address, phone number, primary contact name and phone number, size of room where the contact occurred, number of people in that room, length of contact for each person deemed to likely have been in close contact with the infected individual. That information is shared with the county health department. They review it with their medical personnel and render a decision on who will be required to quarantine. They take into consideration the room's size, number of people in the room, if contact occurred during a time when masks were off (like during lunch) and length of time of the contact. Once we have that information back from them, whenever possible, we will make phone calls to each family explaining the quarantine requirements. The health department is also supposed to assign a contact tracer to contact each family as well. That official call can often take 2-3 days to come. Families with a child that must quarantine are expected to keep the child home and monitor for symptoms until the end of the 14 day period. If your child is ordered to quarantine by the department of health, we will need a copy of the quarantine order with the release from quarantine date in order for your child to return to school. In the event that large numbers of staff members were required to quarantine, it could trigger the entire building to go to a virtual learning model for the period of the quarantine, as you have seen occurring in some area school districts.

### **COVID 19 Testing:**

You may be hearing about testing for COVID coming to be a requirement for schools. I want to make certain everyone is clear about when testing could become a mandate and when it would not. The county has had a desire since last summer to offer optional "pool testing" to schools. They have made a plan to begin soon but at this time it is only for staff and purely voluntary. We will likely participate, but due to the number of schools in our county, it will likely take place on a seven week rotation. This testing is based on the notion that adults, in most cases, seem to be the origin of the virus. The Governor has also been speaking of required testing for schools. This required testing only initiates in the event that a cluster develops in our region that warrants being identified using a cluster color coding system. If we were to fall in any of the three colors designated for clusters (yellow, orange or red), there are implications for schools. In the event we are in the yellow zone of a cluster, schools could remain open as long as we are testing 20% of all teachers, staff and students. We aren't really sure how that would happen, but it would be a requirement and not optional. If we were to fall in an orange or red zone, schools will be closed and all students would be moved to fully virtual learning. Rest assured, all we want is to do everything we can to remain open. Certainly if something occurs that places us in a designated cluster zone we will communicate immediately to all of you so that you have a full understanding of what will take place as a result.

### **Music Department News:**

Please see the enclosed newsletter from the Marcellus Music Department for the latest information and updates.

We are thankful everyday that we are able to work with your children and watch them grow and develop and look forward to the day when we are able to be back with all of our students here at school. Until then, know that we are here if you or your children need assistance with anything.

Sincerely,

*Michelle L. Brantner*

Michelle L. Brantner