



## *Skaneateles Central School District*

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Dear Skaneateles family,

Having just endured our first confirmed case of COVID-19 at Skaneateles Schools, I am reaching out to share additional information about how these cases are handled by the Onondaga and Cayuga County Departments of Health, share what we have learned so far, and answer several questions received over the weekend. We realize how unsettling not knowing can be for our families and many of us endured the same fear and uncertainty for our own children throughout the weekend. To that end, we will constantly work to improve upon our role in this process and work closely with Onondaga and Cayuga County to improve both response time and communication as they complete their investigations. Our first and primary goal is to ensure the health and safety of everyone in the Skaneateles community. Our thoughts are with all who have been impacted by this recent event.

### ***The Process***

When schools become aware of a COVID-19 infection it is typically by direct report from a family or notification from the Department of Health. Depending on the home address, we communicate with either the Onondaga or Cayuga County Department of Health. The applicable agency will work with administration to gather copious information about the students who may be at risk including contact information, specific details about their physical environment, activities, schedules, seating charts, movement throughout the day, and with whom they may have been in close contact. Once the school gathers and distributes this information, the Department of Health begins the process of contact tracing. At this point the school district is no longer involved in the process. During our recent case, contact tracing began Thursday evening and continued throughout the weekend. A team of medical professionals from the Onondaga County Department of Health conducted phone interviews with every person identified as possibly at risk.

\*It is important to note that only the County Health Department conducts contact tracing and only the County Health Department can place individuals in quarantine.

As details emerge throughout the contact tracing process, it is often the case that new information will surface and families will learn details before the school is notified. While we work with Onondaga and Cayuga County to share information at the initial phase of contact tracing, the school district has no say as to who is or is not placed in quarantine. These are exclusively the decisions of the Department of Health and are based on information gathered during contact tracing. Once the investigation concludes, each individual placed in quarantine receives a notice from the Department of Health along with a return to school date. This information is shared with the school district at the end of the process so we can determine when to reopen and to ensure each individual receives appropriate support. Each and every family in quarantine will then be contacted to ensure that there is no loss of access to education for their children.

## ***Lessons Learned***

While this was our first incident at Skaneateles Central Schools, we learned a great deal. We now know exactly what will be asked of us at the onset of contact tracing and are prepared in advance to respond rapidly to any requests for information. We identified additional opportunities to limit exposure, duration of exposure, and student/ faculty/ staff proximity throughout the day. We learned as a school community that COVID-19 is real and it is here in Skaneateles. We learned to quickly pivot from in person to remote instruction in a productive way for students and their families. We learned that we need to include a community voice in conversations about how to constantly improve how we manage this as a school community. To that end, we are assembling a small representative parent committee to discuss recent events and identify opportunities for improvement. The work of that committee will be shared in subsequent communications.

## ***Questions and Answers***

Several families reached out with questions over the weekend and I hope the information below will provide some additional clarity:

Q: How will I be contacted if my child is exposed and what will the timeframe be?

A: You will be contacted exclusively by the Department of Health. The contact tracers request information from the school district and, once received, they prioritize their efforts as to whom they contact and when. We have no control over the timeframe of this process and often additional information surfaces in these conversations which will lead to additional families being contacted. At the end of this investigation it is clear that proximity and duration of exposure are key indicators identified in contact tracing. The limited scope of our recent event is due in part to our mask wearing procedures, our cohort model, and our social distancing practices. While no faculty and staff were identified in this incident, 15 total students have been placed in precautionary quarantine by the Onondaga County Department of Health.

Q: How can we support families impacted by COVID-19?

A: The best thing we can do to support families is to ensure their privacy. These events cause a great deal of panic and concern in a community and anything we can do to preserve the privacy of individuals and their family members is critical. As a school we are bound by strict privacy and confidentiality rules that prohibit our sharing of information.

Q: If my child is in the same class as someone who is in quarantine, will the school let me know?

A: No. We cannot reveal any information that might compromise the confidentiality of our students and their family members. The Department of Health has a team of medical professionals trained to make these determinations and if your family was not contacted directly, you were not deemed at risk by the Department of Health during contact tracing.

Q: Are siblings of a student in quarantine required to be tested?

A: No they are not unless specifically directed to by the Department of Health. Any parents concerned have access to free testing daily at NBT Bank Stadium.

Q: If an impacted student is on an athletics team, will the entire team be required to quarantine?

A: Not necessarily. The Department of Health will make that determination during their contact tracing efforts.

Q: What triggers a district-wide closure vs a single building closure?

A: This decision is entirely dependent on the quality of information we have at the time. If there is no evidence that exposure left the individual building, an individual school will close. When we know that the likelihood of exposure across buildings is possible, out of an abundance of caution, we will close all schools.

Thank you for your flexibility and your thoughtful questions as we navigate these challenges together.

Stronger together,



Eric Knuth  
Superintendent of Schools