

Berks County School District Superintendent Decision-Making Process

“Unprecedented Times Call for Unprecedented Solutions”

Since Governor Tom Wolf’s March 13 announcement regarding the mandated school closures, Berks County School District superintendents have been meeting virtually on a regular basis to discuss the many uncertainties, address questions, and strategize solutions to navigate the COVID-19 crisis. All conversations and decisions are centered on the health and well-being of staff, students, families, and community members. These meetings are being facilitated by Berks County Intermediate Unit administrators and have also included Berks County Career and Technology Center leadership.

Prioritizing the health and safety of all Pennsylvanians, the matrix below represents Governor Wolf’s data-driven plan to utilize a three-phase approach to determine when counties and/or regions are ready to begin easing some restrictions on work, congregate settings, and social interactions. This chart was minimized to include only relevant school-based information that superintendents will use to make decisions regarding all events (e.g., instructional settings, sports, summer programs, student logistics, end-of-year activities).

Using the three-phase approach for reopening Pennsylvania and the current guidelines issued by the Governor, the Berks County total number of COVID-19 cases would need to reach the target goal of a daily average of 15 new cases over a 14-day period (approximately 211 cases spread across 14 days) in order to lessen restrictions into the yellow phase from our present red phase.

DECISION-MAKING MATRIX:

Red	Yellow	Green
Work & Congregate Setting Restrictions		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Life Sustaining Businesses Only Schools (for In-Person Instruction) and Most Child Care Facilities Closed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Telework Must Continue Where Feasible Businesses with In-Person Operations Must Follow Business and Building Safety Orders Child Care Open with Worker and Building Safety Orders Schools Remain Closed for In-Person Instruction 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All Businesses Must Follow CDC and PA Department of Health Guidelines
Social Restrictions		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stay at Home Orders in Place Large Gatherings Prohibited Only Travel for Life-Sustaining Purposes Encouraged Reiterate and Reinforce Safety Guidance for Businesses, Workers, Individuals, and Facilities; Update if Necessary Monitor Public Health Indicators; Adjust Orders and Restrictions as Necessary 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stay at Home Restrictions Lifted in Favor of Aggressive Mitigation Large Gatherings of More than 25 Prohibited Indoor Recreation, Health and Wellness Facilities, and All Entertainment Remain Closed All Businesses Must Follow CDC and DOH Guidance for Social Distancing and Cleaning Monitor Public Health Indicators; Adjust Orders and Restrictions as Necessary 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Aggressive Mitigation Orders Lifted All Individuals Must Follow CDC and PA Department of Health Guidelines Monitor Public Health Indicators; Adjust Orders and Restrictions as Necessary

As the end of the school year draws closer, one critical decision for school district officials is how to best handle graduation ceremonies for the Class of 2020. Beginning May 8, Pennsylvania will start its phased reopening plan and evaluation of ongoing data to determine the appropriate use of the matrix. Health Department Secretary Dr. Rachel Levine shared that it is unlikely the state will reach a point when in-person high school graduations will be held during the existing timelines due to the precautions that need to be taken because of the global pandemic.

Many circumstances related to the pandemic are beyond our control, including social distancing guidelines impacting traditional end-of-year graduation plans. With large group gatherings prohibited as per Governor Wolf’s order, school districts find it necessary to devise alternative plans and/or dates to appropriately recognize seniors while managing the challenges and realities of the situation.

With that in mind, to ensure public health and safety, as well as to exercise the Centers for Disease Control social distancing guidelines and comply with state orders, Berks County school superintendents are committed to devising alternative graduation plans in order to honor and congratulate seniors for their many achievements and officially graduate the Class of 2020.

These discussions are taking place under the idea of “unprecedented times call for unprecedented solutions.” School officials have been soliciting feedback from seniors and discussing options with staff and board members. Thus far, some of the ideas surrounding alternative graduation plans include the following:

- * Virtual Ceremonies
- * Individual Diploma Presentations
- * Later Alternative Dates (pending public health data)
- * Community Parades
- * Signs Placed in Yards and School Grounds Honoring Seniors

Regardless of the decision selected by each school district for graduation, superintendents are united in protecting the experience for our seniors and celebrating the Class of 2020 for their achievements, while also balancing the safety needs that are required of all of us at this time.

Recognizing flexibility is key in adapting to current data and guidance related to minimizing the spread of COVID-19, superintendents will continue to collaborate with all stakeholders (board members, school administrators, students, staff, parents, community members, and county officials). As superintendents move forward in making decisions related to school instruction, programs, and activities during these unprecedented times, the priority remains on keeping their communities safe and healthy while adhering to the guidelines that are part of the Governor’s “Reopening Pennsylvania” plan.

Communication and collaboration between our school leaders is critical in navigating the circumstances affecting the 70,000+ students in Berks County. The 18 Berks County school superintendents who are meeting virtually to share best practices and make informed decisions include the following individuals:

Berks County Superintendents:

Antietam	Mr. Jeffrey Boyer	Boyertown Area	Dr. Dana Bedden
Brandywine Heights Area	Mr. Andrew Potteiger	Conrad Weiser Area	Dr. Randall Grove
Daniel Boone Area	Dr. Brett Cooper	Exeter Township	Dr. Robert Phillips
Fleetwood Area	Dr. Greg Miller	Governor Mifflin	Dr. Steve Gerhard
Hamburg Area	Dr. Richard Mextorf	Kutztown Area	Mr. Christian Temchatin
Muhlenberg	Dr. Joseph Macharola	Oley Valley	Dr. Tracy Shank
Reading	Dr. Khalid Mumin	Schuylkill Valley	Dr. Cindy Mierzejewski
Tulpehocken Area	Mr. Andrew Netznik	Twin Valley	Dr. Robert Pleis
Wilson	Dr. Richard Faidley	Wyomissing Area	Mr. Robert Scoboria

Additional education leaders participating in the superintendent planning and decision-making meetings include:

Schuylkill Valley School District:

Mr. Michael Mitchell, Assistant to the Superintendent

Berks County Intermediate Unit:

Dr. Jill Hackman, Executive Director

Mrs. Michelle Reichard-Huff, Director, Early Childhood and Student Services

Mr. Dan Richards, Director, Office of Professional Development and Curriculum

Berks Career and Technology Center:

Dr. James Kraft, Executive Director