

October 22, 2021

Dear SNEP Parents and Families,

The Reopening Committee would like to share an update on COVID-19 as it relates to our students and families.

Schools in New York State have an obligation to follow our State Health Commissioner's guidance for reporting student and faculty cases of COVID-19. Public health law prevents us from deviating from this guidance. When SNEP is informed of a positive COVID-19 case within our school, we immediately contact the New York State Contact Tracing Initiative School Specialist who has been assigned to Niagara County and SNEP. Most times, the contact tracer for our school has already been informed, as the lab providing the COVID-19 test is also obligated to report this information. An investigation then ensues, and we cooperate by providing any requested information. The state then assigns county contact tracers to contact the students and staff who have been identified as close contacts.

Some families have reported frustration with delays in being contacted by the county, as well as inconsistent information being provided from contact tracers. There are multiple factors at play here, none of which we at SNEP can control. While we sympathize with the frustrations, please understand we are not at liberty to create our own protocols or quarantine procedures, outside of our state commissioner's guidance. Students and staff determined to be COVID-19 positive or deemed exposed and in quarantine, will not be allowed to come to school and could potentially put others at risk. Following the guidance from NYS is the best way to keep our community healthy and safe, which has been our goal from the start.

Since the 2021-2022 school year began, SNEP has had a total of 4 positive COVID-19 cases, 1 of which is an active case. Considering our student and faculty volume, our personal rate of overall positivity since school began is 2%. As of 10/21/2021, Niagara County's daily rate of positivity is 4.1%. Our county's weekly percent positivity is 5.5%, which is considered High Transmission by the CDC.

Two exposures occurred while at SNEP, requiring quarantine of close contacts with the infected individual. Both exposures occurred while outdoors, when children were unmasked. While masks are generally not recommended while outdoors, we have learned that the state considers any student or staff member that is unmasked and within 6 feet of an infected individual for more than a cumulative total of 15 minutes to have been "exposed", **whether the exposure occurs indoors or outdoors.**

For this reason we will continue to ask students who are engaged in outdoor activities that require them to be closer than 6 feet, to wear their masks. If a student does test positive, those who were masked around this individual would not need to quarantine, per the current definition of “close contact”. Examples of activities include spending time on the playground, playing foursquare and basketball.

We realize your frustration with school and work absences due to exposures and quarantine. Unfortunately, this is what we must comply with to keep our children learning and growing while in-person at school, in the safest environment possible. We would like to encourage all SNEP community members to help protect each other and to consider COVID-19 vaccination if age-eligible.

We thank you for your cooperation in assisting us in educating and nurturing your children. These are challenging times, but, as always, the SNEP community has demonstrated its resilience and strength. Please forward any questions or concerns to our Health Monitor, Tarah Lawrence at tlawrence@stella-niagara.com.

Thank you,

The Reopening Committee