

Cheektowaga-Sloan Union Free School District

Mrs. Andrea L. Galenski
Superintendent of Schools
(716) 891-6402



Board of Education
Denise McCowan - President
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November 12, 2020

Dear Cheektowaga-Sloan Parent/Guardian:

I am writing today with an update on the current Yellow Zone situation.

As I communicated on Monday, November 9, 2020, our District falls within the Erie County Yellow Zone “micro-cluster” created by New York State that day. That designation requires schools to test randomly at least 20% of students, teachers, and staff weekly in order to remain open for any in-person instruction. This is part of a new strategy announced by the State in October that also includes the possibility of moving to an Orange or Red Zone, which would expressly require schools to end in-person instruction.

In response to this designation, we immediately surveyed parents throughout the District about testing students for COVID-19. District-wide, 862 people responded to the survey, with a majority indicating that they would not agree to having their children tested. The results were spread nearly equally across all schools, with only JFK High School having a slight majority who would agree to testing.

We recognize that these survey results cannot be the only factor in deciding what is best for the District and its families as a whole. However, other considerations also point in the direction that we may need to pivot temporarily to 100% remote instruction.

We were shocked a few days ago when the Erie County Department of Health announced that they would not support schools with testing. I have been in frequent communication with them for months and never previously had any suggestion this would be their response. Unfortunately, it seems, this current uptick in cases locally along with the large number of schools included in the Yellow Zone exceeds their capacity.

This means that we would either need to become licensed to test at the schools or contract with an outside vendor. While the test kits come at no cost, either option would be very expensive as it would involve hiring personnel, partnering with a private company, organizing testing sites, and processing all of the tests none of which are even immediately available. The combination of all of these resources and time creates a significant expense.

As other districts have been noting, we are also starting to experience staffing limitations as a result of the increase in COVID-19 rates in our area as well as positive cases now in our District. While we are maintaining strict compliance with State guidelines and believe our schools are among the safest public places right now, community spread is still creating quarantine

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Our mission is to provide a positive academic and social learning environment that fosters independence, responsibility, life-long learning and student success.

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obligations that affect us directly. Coupled with the above considerations, we may be better positioned to provide daily education in a temporary fully-remote arrangement than attempting to overcome significantly increasing daily challenges to continue our hybrid model at this time.

Please note that above all else we all recognize that having students physically present in our schools is ideal which makes this new designation of being in a Yellow Zone most upsetting. It has been so rewarding to me, our teachers, administrators, and all staff members to have students back in school even if only two days a week. This new zoning process really targeted schools unexpectedly and has caused us to feel upset about the possibility, even if temporary, of not interacting with the children in person. It is with tremendous disappointment that we are in a position of having to make this difficult decision on whether or not we need to temporarily pivot to 100% remote learning. Luckily, we have prepared for this possibility extensively and are so fortunate that we have the advantage of over two months of experience with the hybrid model, including some students in a fully-remote program, to start this school year.

We are learning new information daily and I expect to know more tomorrow so that an informed decision for our District can be made. I wish that we had more time to make a decision, but given the recent notice about our Yellow Zone designation and expectations from the Governor, we are forced to make an expedited decision. I will inform everyone as soon as possible about our decision to pivot to 100% remote learning so that our families are able to plan. I encourage all parents to please visit our website for childcare resources that can assist you during this time.

Please know that should we need to move temporarily to 100% remote learning, this does not mean that it is for a lengthy period of time as it was last spring. My number one priority will continue to be the safety of all students and staff in our schools as well as entering back into our hybrid model as quickly and safely as possible.

Thank you for your unending support and understanding as we continue to navigate unprecedented circumstances.

Sincerely,

Andrea L. Galenski
Superintendent of Schools