



ANDOVER REGIONAL SCHOOL DISTRICT

Office of the Superintendent

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Newton, NJ 07860

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January 8, 2021

Dear Parents/Guardians and Staff:

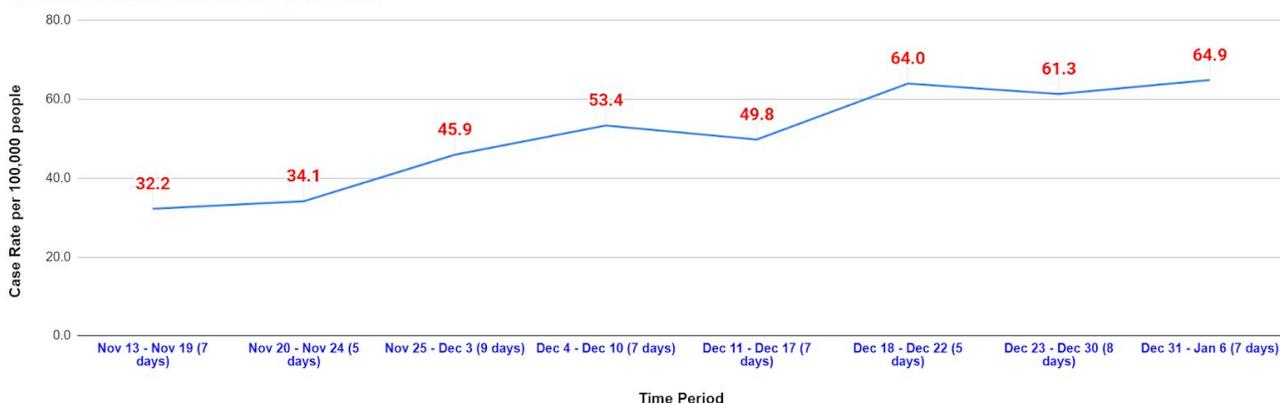
Good evening. I hope all of our Andover school families and staff were able to have a relaxing, safe and enjoyable holiday season. The purpose of this communication is to give our school community an update on the status of COVID-19 in Sussex County and Andover, along with an explanation of how this information will affect the decisions made regarding the instructional programming for our school district. As you know, a decision was made in November to move to fully remote instruction November 23, 2020 through January 15, 2021, with a tentative return to our in-person hybrid instructional model on January 19, 2021. This decision was based on the COVID-19 information of our region classifying us as a “high risk category” (orange), the holiday season of travel and large gatherings, and the recommendations from the local health department. At that time, we also indicated that we would continue to monitor COVID-19 through collaboration with the Sussex County Department of Health to guide our future district instructional programming decisions.

This morning the Sussex County Superintendents’ Roundtable Association met in consultation with both the Sussex County Department of Health (DOH) and the Department of Education (NJDOE). The main focus of the meeting was to discuss the current status of the COVID-19 pandemic in Sussex County and determine a safe path forward in our school districts.

As anticipated, when the [COVID-19 Activity Level Index CALI](#) was released this week, our region continues to fall in the orange, a high risk classification. Again, it is under this classification that the New Jersey Department of Health recommends that “fully remote instruction should be considered”. The New Jersey Department of Health recommendations state that schools remaining open in “high risk” regions need to exclude close contacts with staff or students who have COVID-like symptoms (for example cough, headache, runny nose, sore throat). This, once again, means schools would be sending home to quarantine anyone who has these symptoms for 10 days and every close contact of that person for 14 days, which could place a large burden on our schools and families. This quickly could lead to excessive student absences and an inability to staff our hybrid instructional programs.

In addition to the CALI report, the COVID-19 cases in Sussex County continue to increase and are at a “very high risk/red” category (defined as more than 25.0 per 100,000 people).

Sussex County Case Rate over Time



The number of COVID-19 cases in Andover Township and Boro have also dramatically increased the last two plus months as indicated in the chart below.

MONTH/DATES	TOWNSHIP	BORO	TOTAL # INCREASE CASES
September 4 - October 1	248 → 250	2 → 2	2
October 1 - November 1	250 → 260	2 → 5	13
November 1 - December 1	260 → 317	5 → 11	63
December 1-January 3	317 → 414	11 → 26	112
January 3-6	414 → 434	26 → 26	20

As far as the number of COVID-19 cases in our schools, we did not have any school cases in the months of September and October. We had six positive cases reported in November, and three reported cases in December. However, the number of cases in December through the date of this letter, we are unsure of the accuracy, as the Department of Health has not reported out to schools all cases for school districts on fully remote instruction.

Each state is also reporting its data to Covid Act Now <https://covidactnow.org/>, a nonprofit founded in March 2020 in partnership with major national health centers at Georgetown, Stanford, and Harvard Universities. The data is submitted by each state and can be drilled down to the county level to compare with other counties. You can find Sussex County data at https://covidactnow.org/us/new_jersey-nj/county/sussex_county.

As of this morning, the report states that **our area is in “active or imminent outbreak”**. It reads, “Sussex County is either actively experiencing an outbreak or is at extreme risk. COVID cases are exponentially growing and/or Sussex County’s COVID preparedness is significantly below international standards.”

A key metric reported by Covid Act Now is the *infection rate*. Today it reads, “On average, each person in Sussex County, New Jersey with COVID is infecting 1.11 other people. As such, **the total number of active cases in Sussex County, New Jersey is growing at an unsustainable rate**. If this trend continues, the hospital system may become overloaded. Caution is warranted.”

This is the fifth highest rate among the state’s 21 counties. Our county department of health reported to us today that there is a recent spike in hospitalizations at Newton and Morristown Medical Centers, which has been confirmed by hospital administrators.

It is with the above information taken into account, combined with the continued collaboration with the Sussex County Department of Health and the Superintendents of School Districts across Sussex County that will guide our future instructional decisions. My office has also worked very closely with the Superintendent of Schools in our regional districts of Newton and Green Township, as we feel it is important that our PreK through grade twelve students and families have consistency.

The question as to whether we are going to resume our hybrid/in-person instruction on Tuesday, January 19th has not yet been determined. Though we want to resume our hybrid model of instruction as soon as possible, we remain committed to keeping our primary focus on the health and safety of our students and staff. Our county and local case rates are still very high, and infections are growing at an unsustainable rate. We hope that this will change soon. A formal announcement may not be made until the end of next week. However, whatever decision is made, it is extremely important that our families are prepared to pivot to 100% remote learning at any time. This could occur due to the county and local status of COVID-19, inability to staff our buildings, excessive student absences, or an outbreak of cases in our schools and/or community.

We understand the difficulty these decisions continue to cause for our families. However, the health and well-being of our students, staff, and the entire school community will continue to be the utmost importance to us during this health pandemic. During the coming months, with the winter season coming to a close and the distribution of vaccines, we hope to start the process of returning to some normalcy in our schools.

Please be advised that an updated communication will be forthcoming by the end of next week. Thank you for your continued support and cooperation during these difficult times.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Dennis Tobin".

Dennis Tobin
Interim Superintendent of Schools