



# Sachem Central School District

*Christopher J. Pellettieri, Ed.D., Superintendent of Schools*

December 7, 2020

Dear Sachem Family,

Unfortunately, it seems each time I write to our school community I am writing about COVID related issues. Believe me, I would prefer this were not the case. That being said, cases continue to rise throughout Long Island and in our neighborhoods. According to the Suffolk County Department of Health these cases are spreading from local community gatherings outside of schools rather than in school settings. Thus far staff positive cases are extremely low when compared to student cases which is another indicator that the cases are coming from outside the schools not spreading within them. All of these positive cases, however, directly impact our schools as students and staff in close contact with positive students, (less than 6 feet for more than 10 minutes) need to be quarantined for 14 days in New York. This is because thus far NYS has not yet adopted the shorter quarantine proposed by the CDC. This impact has been disproportionate as both our high schools are seeing cases in far greater numbers than middle and elementary schools. Sachem North, you will recall, started out the year with an outside event that caused quite a few cases and they continue to have more cases than any other school in the district. The increase in positive cases has put enormous strain on the administration of our buildings who are working seven days a week on contact tracing. Also, the numbers of teachers and staff that sometimes need to quarantine as a result of these positive cases are putting a strain on the buildings. If we do not soon turn this tide, we will be forced to make decisions such as transitioning to distance learning, in particular at the secondary or high school levels. While we are obviously concerned about every single case, data is still telling us schools are the safest places for our kids. As a result, we continue to keep them open. I saw a sign recently that stated, "If we do not work together, we cannot be together". We want our youngsters in schools, but this is getting harder by the day to realize. I am going to ask that we continue to social distance, practice safe hygiene protocols and wear masks when around other people.

Recently we sent an email with a survey that asked if the schools could test your school aged children if we are designated as a Yellow Zone. As the cases continue to rise around us there is more of a need to prepare for testing. We would need 20% of our parents to allow us to test students here in schools (We are not permitted to use outside lab-based tests. I wish we were) to keep all schools in the district open for in person learning. For Sachem that is 2,400 students. We would also need 400 staff to test as well. I am resending the survey link, [Willingness to Test](#),

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as thus far we have had only 1,500 out of potentially 12,000 responses come back and obviously not all of them have given consent. You would need to utilize your child's Google Account to answer the survey. The test would be a gentle nose swab conducted by a trained health care professional. The name of the test that will be given to us by NYS is the BinaxNOW COVID-19 Ag Card. We would be utilizing a large space in the buildings such as gym or cafeteria for the tests and we would get the results in 15 minutes. I ask that you respond to the survey as soon as possible.

On another note, I understand many people are getting tests at local clinics. As you await the results of these tests, students and staff must remain at home until you obtain the negative test result. Even if one were to receive a negative result from a rapid test, we would need everyone who has been tested to stay home until you have received the results of the PCR test.

Lastly, in order to be as transparent as possible and to allow you to keep track of all of the COVID – 19 positive cases in the district, we have created as promised, a COVID – 19 Data Dashboard which is now live on our website under the COVID -19 Info tab on the district main page. You can find the link here: [http://www.sachem.edu/covid\\_letters/covid\\_letters](http://www.sachem.edu/covid_letters/covid_letters)

This Dashboard shows all positive cases in the district whether they are at a particular school or districtwide. If you have a child at an elementary building, middle and/or high school you can very quickly see all the cases in those buildings along with 14 day and 7 day positive cases. I am confident you will find this to be more efficient than my emails stating cases in the various buildings. The Dashboard is updated every weekday as well so the information will be much timelier. Please note every single positive case that impacts our schools results in a conversation between our staff and either the Suffolk County Health Department and/or the New York State Department of Health about the health and safety of students and staff along with proper next steps.

In closing, I ask that you remain as vigilant as ever with your health and the health of our youngsters. We are concerned with every single member of our Sachem family and if we work together, I know we will come through all of this in a better place.

Please stay well.

*Chris Pellettieri*

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