

# **Saranac Central School District**

PO Box 8, Saranac, New York 12981 Tel. (518) 565-5600 ~ Fax (518) 565-5617

Good Afternoon,

I want to provide an update about how things have gone with our first week having in-person instruction under our belts as well as an update on a very important change in practice.

I am happy to report that we have had a very successful week with our students across the district but in particular our students in our buildings which are PreK through 2<sup>nd</sup> grade and some of our specialized classrooms at all levels. It has been great to see some of our students return to our buildings. I am also very grateful for the patience and understanding that has been displayed by our entire school community but especially those parents and families that have participated in our arrival and dismissal process. This process seems to be getting better every day.

I also want the community to know that we are moving forward with our work to bring more students into our buildings. Next week we will continue to only have our PreK through 2<sup>nd</sup> grade and some of our specialized classrooms attend in-person instruction with the goal of possibly adding the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade the following week. I understand that at least part of our community would like me to move faster in bringing our students back. I too as well as our Administration, faculty, staff would like our students back, but I still have some significant concerns about moving too fast. Once we can bring our 3<sup>rd</sup> graders into our buildings, I will make weekly announcements about next steps. Unfortunately, I am not able to commit to specific dates that I will bring the other grades into our buildings.

## **What We Have Learned:**

- Having students back in the building challenges our staffing patterns much more than anticipated due to all the protocols we must have in place per our NYSED and NYDOH guidance.
- Arrival and dismissal have gone better than anticipated as well. It has taken using the faculty and staff that currently do not have students in the building. So, as we bring more students into our buildings, we lose that help.
- Students are doing a great job with all the requirements placed on them.

## **Change in Practice:**

There will be a significant change in practice starting on Monday September 28. Currently the practice has been that if a student and or faculty/staff member have a COVID-19 symptom they would have to go to the doctor and the doctor would decide if they need a COVID-19 test. This will no longer be the case. The change is that anyone that has a COVID-19 symptom will need three things to happen to return and they are as follows:

- 1) Proof of negative COVID-19 test;
- 2) **AND** documentation of an evaluation by a healthcare provider (healthcare provider note clearing the student to return to school);
- 3) **AND** once there is no fever for 24 hours (100 or above) without the use of fever reducing medicines, and they have felt well for 24 hours (symptom resolution)

This change in practice has been brought on by the NYS Department of Health. Let me try and explain how we have arrived at this change in practice. The guidance from the NYSDOH has always stated that a negative COVID-19 test was required for students or faculty/staff. In our work with our local health department office it was determined that we would use the first practice of allowing people back if a doctor decided no test was needed. This decision was made because of an understanding that there was further guidance expected to loosen the requirements for people's return to school buildings. This new guidance has not been distributed and in fact we have been led to believe that it will not be coming. Our local health departments also heard from the office of NYSDOH and the message was that the original guidance should be strictly followed.

On Wednesday September 23 I participated in a meeting with the Clinton County Health Department and the other Clinton County School Superintendents. The purpose of the meeting was to make it clear for us what our practice should be regarding responding to COVID-19 symptomatic people in our buildings. We are instructed to use the list of symptoms as identified by the CDC. The following is the current list of symptoms identified as COVID-19 symptoms by the CDC:

- Fever 100 degrees or greater
- Chills
- Cough
- Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing
- Fatigue
- Muscle or body aches
- Headache
- New loss of taste or smell
- Sore throat
- Congestion or runny nose
- Nausea or vomiting
- Diarrhea

To be clear if any student, faculty, or staff member has any one or more of the symptoms listed above they will have to leave or not come to our building. The next step would be to see a doctor and have a COVID-19 test administered. That person would only be able to return to one of our buildings if they had a doctor's note, proof of a negative COVID-19 test, and having the symptoms that started the process resolved.

I also want to be clear that this is not a practice that I as the Saranac Central School Superintendent has chosen to put into place. This is a practice that I have been directed to put into place by the New York State Department of Health.

John Kanoza, Director of Public Health at the Clinton County Health Department said, "The Clinton County Health Department has been in very close communications with both Champlain Valley Educational Services (CVES) and individual school districts to discuss specific questions relating to the latest (August 2020) requirements set forth by the New York State Department of Health (NYSDOH). We recognize the current NYSDOH requirements create a burden for families, schools, and local medical providers but as they are the most current recommendations from the NYSDOH for COVID-19, they must be followed."

It is very clear that this practice alone is going to cause quite the problem for our families, faculty, staff, and local doctor's offices.

This practice will also lead to increased challenges in staffing our buildings. As I stated before we have already been challenged with our staffing patterns, but I believe that this will only intensify this challenge. I can only assume that this practice will result in more students, faculty, and staff being sent home or not allowed to enter our buildings. All these people will have to secure doctor's appointments and COVID-19 testing, which will in turn lead to it becoming more difficult for anyone to get in to see a doctor and will equal all these people being out longer.

Every year brings a part of the year with an increased amount of illness among our school community. Last year I sent out an email to families as we had seen many students with cold and flu like symptoms. Any of the students, faculty, and staff with cold or flu like symptoms will not be able to enter our buildings and will have to follow the protocol for return. This yearly trend has not even begun.

This is an issue that I am very concerned about and am worried that it could lead to my inability to appropriately staff our buildings. If this is the case than I will have no choice but to move our district to a fully remote instruction model. I am disappointed to have to move in this direction but as stated above this was not a choice that was given to me; instead, a practice I am directed to follow.

I am still committed to moving forward and do all we can to bring more students into our buildings for as long as we can but I must ensure that I have the appropriate level of staffing to do so safely. Safety continues to be the most important part of this very difficult process. I also understand that nothing about this process is ideal and I am committed to work with families to the full extent of my ability to help.

Again, I want to thank this entire school community for its patience, understanding, and support during this time of crisis. As always please feel free to contact me with any questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Javier Perez', with a large, sweeping flourish extending to the left.

Javier Perez  
Superintendent of Schools