



*Serving With Pride The  
Township of Manalapan  
and the  
Borough of Englishtown*

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Dear Parents and Guardians,

From the onset of the pandemic, our district has followed the COVID-19 guidelines from the NJ Department of Health (NJDOH), the Department of Education and the local health department. Adhering to these protocols has been effective in keeping our staff and students safe; doing so has also allowed our schools to remain open when other districts could not. At the same time, though, following the close contact guidelines has resulted in a large number of students needing to quarantine; and in some situations, students have had to quarantine on more than one occasion.

At each Board of Education meeting, I update the Board on COVID-19 data related to our district. At last evening's meeting, I specifically presented data on the number of students who have tested positive for COVID-19; the number of students who have been placed on quarantine; and, most importantly, the number of students who were identified as close contacts and who then tested positive during quarantine. Our data, as of yesterday, depicts that 306 positive cases of COVID-19 have been documented in our school buildings. Of those 306 positive cases, 29 were close contacts — 18 of which were close contacts in the cafeteria and 11 being close contacts on the bus. In reviewing this information, though, it is essential that one recognize that when two close contacts test positive for COVID-19, it may not be a result of in-school transmission. There are many incidents where two students test positive for unrelated purposes or due to contacts occurring outside school.

Currently, the guidelines from the NJDOH define close contacts in the classroom differently to close contacts on school buses. Based on the guidelines for the bus, if a student sits within six feet of an identified positive case, the student is required to quarantine. In the classroom, if a student is correctly and consistently wearing a well-fitted mask and sits within three to six feet from an identified infected person, the student is excluded from the definition of a close contact.

At last evening's Board of Education meeting, the Board voted to treat school buses in the same context as classrooms — in terms of identifying close contacts. This changes our exemption to close contacts to read as follows:

*In the PreK–8 indoor classroom setting, **including buses**, or a structured outdoor setting where mask use can be observed (i.e., holding class outdoors with educator supervision), the close contact definition excludes students who were within 3 to 6 feet of an infected student (laboratory-confirmed or a clinically compatible illness) where both the infected student and the exposed student(s) correctly and consistently wore well-fitting masks the entire time. This exception does not apply to teachers, staff, or other adults in the indoor classroom setting.*

The intent of this change is to continue to keep students safe while, at the same time, keeping more students in school. Thank you for your understanding and cooperation.

Sincerely,

Nicole Santora, Ed.D.  
Superintendent of Schools