

September 3, 2020

Dear BNS community,

First, I'd personally like to thank everyone who has committed to making this year a success ... and by everyone I mean *each and every one of you*. Whether you are a remote or in-person learner, a teacher, or a grandparent. Whether you are finishing your 9th year as a parent, 14th year as a teacher, or your first few weeks as a new member of our community, your efforts to support our community have been critical. And valued. Thank you.

I am writing to discuss the recent rise in cases in our area. We - the board and BNS health committee - are paying close attention to this. YOU are also paying close attention to this as evidenced by your recent emails and questions about how to safely engage in the world given that we are now living (or are soon to be living) in a "red zone" (defined as ≥ 25 cases/100,000 population). We thank you for being so thoughtful about how your decisions impact everyone who is coming to school in-person (and all those with whom you also interact outside of school). This awareness highlights further the extent to which we are a community that is looking out for one another with our choices and actions.

Because we have recently seen cases rise, and as we approach a three-day weekend, the board is writing to ask everyone to continue to be vigilant and mindful about your actions and to consider how these actions will impact our school community. We ask this so that we can maintain our safe in-person learning environment as long as possible. Below, I provide a summary of what we know, what we are doing (and why), and some more details about what we are asking of our in-person learners and teaching staff.

As always, if you have questions, reach out. In the meantime: Be well. Stay safe.
Kiyah on behalf of the board

Here's what we know

- Cases are going up in Blacksburg, Radford, and the surrounding areas. Radford is now a red zone according to the [Harvard global epidemics site](#). Montgomery County is likely to be one soon.
- According to the department of health, a majority of these cases are isolated in the student community. It was recently estimated that Radford University's students account for approximately 98% of the city's cases and about 95% of Montgomery County's cases can be attributed to Virginia Tech students.
- As of right now, cases in the student population are connected with other cases in the student population and cases within the community are connected with other cases in the community.
- This rise in numbers is not unexpected, given the recent influx of individuals now living in the community.



- These numbers are likely to continue to rise. A recent Roanoke Times article [predicted a plateau “soon”](#), while a UVA study suggests the [peak may not come until mid-October](#).
- BNS has already implemented – and will maintain – strict mitigation protocols. These were created using the assumption that COVID19 was in our area. The strategies do not change, at this point, but it's critical that they are maintained.

Here's what we are doing and WHY

- Several months ago we created the [BNS travel guidelines](#) to outline what we knew to be safer and riskier travel behavior.
 - An important piece of these guidelines was to highlight (1) *modes/forms of travel*, (2) *gathering*, (3) *behavior*, and (4) *destination as important components of “travel” behavior*.
 - These four areas are all important aspects of minimizing our personal and community risk.
 - At the time these guidelines were created, our community numbers were low and the travel guidelines were intended to help our community make mindful decisions about where we traveled and how we behaved when we were there.
 - The travel guidelines recommended a self-quarantine period after travel to locales with high levels of community spread because the types of behaviors that are common on vacation (eating inside restaurants, traveling using high density forms of public transportation, encountering individuals outside our household, etc.) will increase risk of exposure.
 - Cases are being tracked to known exposure and hospital admissions have not increased.
- We continue to carefully monitor case numbers using available reports - including from the Virginia Department of Health, VT and Radford dashboards, and [this Blacksburg dashboard](#) (created by a BNS parent's student) - and we are communicating regularly with our health committee and as a board (we have another meeting next week).
- Our BNS liaisons with the New River Health District will continue to determine appropriate courses of action if cases arise in members of our BNS community.
- We are regularly checking with our teaching staff, to determine their level of comfort with being in person.

Here's what we're asking of in-person learners

- Consider your actions: We now live in one of those “high-risk” zones mentioned in our travel guidelines, and this means that it's critical that we all carefully consider the level of risk inherent in our choices and behaviors. This is especially true for in-person learners and their families, but important for all of us to consider.
- Choose lower risk activities: A number of infographics (including [this one](#) and [this one](#)) detail higher and lower risk behaviors. Given what our community numbers are/is

important to consider that, given our community numbers, behaviors that were medium risk when community numbers were lower may now be higher risk.

- Stated more directly: given that we now live (or will soon live) in a red zone, this means that choices like eating inside at a restaurant, playing on sports teams with more than 10 people, visiting a nail/hair salon, or going to a gym are actions that need to be carefully considered. We ask everyone who is making the choice to send their kids to school in-person to also carefully consider *all of their actions* and the additional risk that these behaviors may place on the teachers and other families who are coming to school.
- Stay home if needed: Recognize that the attendance policy is flexible this year and that students may use the remote learning platform if your student or family have engaged in behaviors that have increased your exposure risk.
- Avoid non-essential travel to other high-risk areas: If you do have to travel to another high-risk area, please consider the guidelines for higher and lower risk behavior and whether or not you need to isolate upon your return.
- **We are asking this of you because we want to prioritize the safety of our students and teachers and keeping our school open for in-person learning as long as possible.**