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As always, the #1 Health & Wellness Issue that's on everyone's mind is the pandemic and what is being done to keep staff & students safe:

- **The “2nd Wave” of Covid**, as widely anticipated, has arrived with a vengeance. Positivity rates are as high (or in some cases higher) than back in the Spring. Numerous reasons are the cause of this “2nd Wave” including less outdoor activities (due to cold weather), holiday gatherings and “covid fatigue”. While it has been reported that our schools generally have a lower positivity rate than the general public, there has still been a considerable effect on the school environment, due to the number of cases that have been reported and the exposure quarantines that are required. In fact, most of our school districts are experiencing manpower shortages (of all staffing categories) due to illness & the related quarantines.
- **Vaccinations** – on a positive note, vaccines have now been approved and are currently being administered on a priority category basis. School Personal have been placed in Category 1B and have just been released to start getting vaccinations effective yesterday (Mon. Jan. 11th). It should be noted that in regards to priority categories, students are at the bottom of the list, as its thought that children are less likely to get the virus than adults. It should be further noted that during the clinical trials for the vaccinations, no one under the age of 16 was included. Governor Cuomo's Suffolk County representative sent out an informative package on the safety of the Covid vaccinations on Friday, which I would be happy to share (just send me your email address and I will forward to you)
- **Mental Health Issues & Substance Abuse** – Counselors dealing with these issues are reporting an uptick in cases. Young people are experiencing similar problems dealing with the stress caused by the pandemic as adults and many are looking to drugs and alcohol for relief of this stress. Cases of Depression are also on the rise. While some “low risk sports” (like bowling) have been allowed to commence, many of the winter sports (such as basketball, wrestling & cheerleading) have been cancelled. For many of our students being able to participate in sports is a major part of their school experience. And its not just athletes, students who participate in the arts are being adversely affected, as well with no winter concerts or school plays being scheduled this year. Seniors are especially susceptible to possible depression, as there is no guarantee that the pandemic will be under enough control to allow for events they look forward to, like the Senior Trip & Senior Prom to take place this spring.
- **General Health** – due to the pandemic, many parents have been forgoing routine trips to the doctors &/or dentists for their children. It should be noted that these offices are taking every precaution possible and parents should be trying to get back on track regarding standard visits.
- **Food Insecurity** – unfortunately, due to pandemic related layoffs, many people are currently out of work and struggling to “make ends meet”. If you know of anyone in this situation, please encourage them to have their children take full advantage of the free breakfast and lunch programs being offered in our schools.
- **Legislation** – there is a bill being introduced (A416) that some people have a serious concern about. This bill “relates to the removal of cases, contacts and carriers of communicable diseases who are potentially dangerous to the public health”. The bill is considered by many to be a serious

overreach by the State Government and will probably not make it on to the floor for a vote. Currently there is no sponsor in the State Senate, and it is unlikely to find one. Another piece of legislation to be aware of, Governor Cuomo has announced his intention to once again push for the legalization of recreational marijuana, using the economic stress on the state caused by the pandemic (along with the recent legalization in an adjoining state, New Jersey) and the ability to raise substantial revenue, as the necessity to have this legislation passed. NYS PTA will once again strongly oppose this.

Should anyone have any questions regarding this month's report, please don't hesitate to contact me via email at: **gerardbringmann@gmail.com**

Respectfully submitted ... Gerry Bringmann