



**Report of November 17, 2020 (Revised)**

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

- Holiday Guidance – received a flyer from the NYS Department of Health regarding a “Safe Halloween” just prior to the holiday, which was distributed to members of the BOM. It appears that while many people took heed of these suggestions, as fewer kids were out than normal and for less time, *we still saw an uptick in positive cases. As most of you already know, we have just heard from the State regarding Thanksgiving (& probably Christmas), that we are strongly advised to have indoor gatherings of no more than 10 people.* In addition, there are travel restrictions regarding people coming in from out of state (they are advising against it) with testing & quarantine requirements. Like Halloween, we are looking at a quieter than normal holiday season.
- The CDC made some minor adjustments to their Covid-19 guidelines last month and our schools have been making the appropriate adjustments. I have been hearing some reports about the inefficiency of contact tracing & notifications here in Suffolk, so as always, caution is advised.
- We are now coming into flu season and its recommended that everyone get the appropriate flu shot. Not only will this lessen the chances of getting the flu, but it may also decrease the possibility of getting Covid-19 according to a recent report. As most of us already know, the symptoms for the flu & Covid are similar in a lot of respects, so if your child comes down with the flu, its almost 100% certain that your school district is going to require a negative Covid-19 test before allowing him or her to return to class (hence the recommendation). The burden of proof is going to fall to the parent.
- There has been a lot of talk about the availability of a Covid vaccine and they're definitely getting closer (*with three drug firm claiming they've developed one that's at least 90% effective*), but there's still further testing and approvals needed before any vaccine will be available to the public. We are probably/hopefully looking at first quarter of 2021. There's also been talk of making vaccinations “mandatory” once available. While rumor at this point in time, definitely something that we're going to want to monitor once the State Legislature goes back in session in January.
- There's also been concerns regarding a “second wave” of Covid, *which may already be here, as Long Island has just exceeded the 3% positivity rate.* On the plus side, New York is still in much better shape than most of the United States. However, based on what's happening in Europe, with countries once again “locking down”, we can't discount the possibility of that happening here (especially with so many starting to suffer from what's been referred to as “Covid Fatigue”). The holiday season should tell the tale. *In fact, some school districts are already preparing for the possibility of going “all remote” in early December, should we see any further uptick in the positivity rate after Thanksgiving.*

Last month, I mentioned that we need to remind our parents that they have an obligation to monitor the activities of their children during non-school hours, when it comes to attending social events. Unfortunately, we also need to remind parents that they have an obligation NOT to host such social events in their homes, particularly with large numbers of people. Let us hope the \$2500 fine levied against a Farmingville homeowner by the County of Suffolk last month, will drive that reminder home to others.

Also last month, I spoke about mental health issues and how they are being (or should be) dealt with. I attended a Zoom hearing held by the Suffolk County Opioid Committee chaired by Leg. Sarah Anker on Oct 22<sup>nd</sup> and to no surprise found that illegal drug usage by our youth (& in general) has been on the rise during the pandemic, as people are looking for “stress relief”. This is a major concern, not just for the obvious reasons, but also because of fiscal difficulties being encountered by both Suffolk County & New York State, many organizations that provide counseling services are facing severe funding cuts, so they will have less counselors available to deal with a growing need. To emphasize the seriousness of the this, on the average year (over the last seven years) we lose three high school students to drug overdoses here in Suffolk County (figures provided by the County Medical Examiner).

Another drug related issue that we need to be on the lookout for is that on Election Day, New Jersey voters approved a Proposition that legalizes the sale of recreational marijuana. Due to the fact that our Governor was looking to make this legal in New York State prior to the pandemic, with the State’s current fiscal crisis & another adjoining state legalizing cannabis sales for recreational purposes, 2021 will definitely be the year that our elected officials try to push through this legislation (despite the strenuous objections of NYS PTA).

On a happier note, the USDA has announced that they have extended the “Free Meals for Kids” program, which had been currently set to expire on Dec. 31<sup>st</sup>, for the entire 2020-21 School Year.

Also on the subject of nutrition, I was able to develop a contact with a nutritionist at the Cornell Cooperative Extension, who will be providing me with a list of free webinars that they will be hosting on a monthly basis. I will be asking that these be posted along with my report. To be honest, these will probably be more of an interest to the parents than students, but still worthwhile looking at.

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

Respectfully submitted ... Gerry Bringmann