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# Put to the Test

REPORTING BY SYLVIA MAXWELL AND LILLIAN FARRAND

*Faced with restrictions after Steuben County's move to yellow zone status due to rising COVID-19 cases, students, teachers, and county leaders confront challenges in keeping learning safe for everyone*

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**35** days. **That is how long students attended class in-person before switching to remote learning on Oct. 28.**

Local COVID-19 cases steadily rose throughout September, and on Oct. 21, New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo announced that Steuben County had a positivity rate of 4% over three weeks. As a result, the state declared that the eastern portion of Steuben County was officially in the yellow zone, placing new restrictions on businesses, houses of worship, and schools.

Facing this yellow zone designation, Superintendent Michelle Caulfield was left with a decision — either test 20% of people in the district every week or switch to remote classes. Steuben County Manager Jack Wheeler consulted with Caulfield's team about possible options.

"The largest change is the requirement to test 20% of anyone who's on site — staff, students, a combination of both. Not knowing what that would look like, it was going to be a pretty tough lift because obviously Corning-Painted Post is our largest school district," Wheeler said.

"We are talking about well over 1,000 tests that would need to be conducted per week. That was going to be very untenable because we didn't know what the state was going to provide us in terms of testing supplies

or staff." Though the switch to remote learning took a toll on students who hoped to regain a sense of normalcy after the shutdowns of the previous school year, students like sophomore Hailey Morse tried to make the best of it.

"The thing that affected me most is not being able to see my friends. I don't really get to socialize with anyone other than my parents," Morse said. "That's been the hardest on me, but I've been keeping up. I've been video chatting with my friends, and calling them, using Snapchat, everything to keep up," Morse said.

In her CPPHS office just after the temporary closure, Executive Principal Robin Sheehan reflected on the side effects of virtual learning first-hand.

"My youngest daughter is home today. And, you know, just making sure as a mom, I am helping her to manage and making sure she's on her Google Meet is a lot while I'm also trying to work; I think a lot of families are in that situation where their home life is a little bit turned upside down, because school as we know it has changed. I think it's a big challenge for students and their families," Sheehan said.

Despite the obstacles students faced this year, Language and Literature teacher Christa Calkins was proud of the way they rose to the challenge.

"I had a student last week who was giving

a group presentation and her WiFi went out at home. So instead of emailing me for an extension, she had a parent drive her to a local parking lot where she could pick up some public WiFi to be able to present with her group," Calkins said.

Even though the switch to all-virtual was tough for many involved, the transition was far smoother than the March shutdown as the district was more prepared, according to Wheeler.

"We have weekly calls with our superintendents. We'd been preparing them for a few weeks that the numbers that we were seeing were pretty concerning and to be prepared for response pretty quickly; our schools were very well prepared," Wheeler said.

Students returned to in-person hybrid learning on Nov. 16, five days after Gov. Cuomo announced the end of yellow zone restrictions. After 12 days of remote learning, Sheehan found that the district was prepared to switch quickly between learning types.

"I do feel that we are well-prepared to make shifts between modalities of learning. The guidance has changed a bit now for schools within yellow zones, and that should maximize our likelihood of staying in the hybrid model if our area does again receive a yellow zone designation," Sheehan said.

### A Test You Can't Study For

With students on remote learning until Nov. 16, head district nurse Anne Stefanini swabs assistant principal Nick Kapral's nose in the health office on Nov. 12. The district had to do weekly tests of 20% of its personnel across all buildings during the shutdown; that worked out to Stefanini's team testing 57 high school faculty and staff during each week of the closure. Photo by Aiden Roth

**Local Outbreak** The Corning Center, a nursing home on First Street, reported 25 deaths due to COVID-19 by October 16. The center's first positive case was reported Sept. 3. Staff from the NY State Department of Health and the Centers for Disease Control visited the facility and found no deficiencies in the center's adherence to COVID guidance and infection control. Photo by Aiden Roth



500 POSITIVE CASES

**Aug. 3**

Total cases in Steuben County: **307**

**Aug. 18**

Total cases in Steuben County: **320**

**Sept. 3**

Total cases in Steuben County: **328**  
The first case of COVID-19 detected at the Corning Center nursing home

**Oct. 5**

Total cases in Steuben County: **584**  
Steuben County Health Department reports the first two positive student cases at CPPHS

**Oct. 21**

Total cases in Steuben County: **958**

Steuben County enters **Yellow Zone** restriction

"None of the cases in Steuben County have been traced back to the high school, or any of our schools. Of all the positives that have been reported for the school district, none of them have been traced to somebody else in the Corning-Painted Post School District. They've all been traced to something else in the community, which means we as a school district are doing all the right things," head district nurse Anne Stefanini said.

**Oct. 28**

First day of remote learning  
Total cases in Steuben County: **1075**

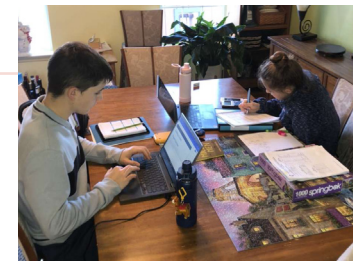
**Nov. 16**

Total cases in Steuben County: **1478**

School reopens to students for **in-person instruction**

"I was not worried about the students coming back because the numbers in our school were not what put us in the yellow zone. Also, my students have been really good at following the protocol and doing what they need to do. Really, I'm self-contained in this room," Susan Ryan, Language and Literature teacher said.

"The advantage of our district and the direction that the administration took is that every day we've had with students is a gift. And the fact that we can go from hybrid right into virtual and not really skip a beat says a lot about the education that our students are getting this year."



**The Table is Set** Twin sophomores Colton and Josie Loeber attend their classes from the same table at home during the yellow zone school closure. "It's actually helpful because in our classes, we can ask each other questions. We're in all the same classes, just in different periods. So, if we're confused about something and the other person has already had the class, we can ask them about it which is pretty helpful," Colton Loeber said. Photo provided by Josie Loeber **Three's Company** On Dec. 8, twins McKenna and Bailey Roth work on their classwork while their cat Braille sleeps on Bailey's bed. "We each have our own desk in our separate rooms but normally, I'm the one who comes into my sister, McKenna's, room. She has an extra chair in there that I sit on. But if she comes into my room, normally, she's sitting at my desk, and I'm somewhere sitting on my bed. So I mean, it's very convenient," Bailey Roth said. "If we don't know something, we just look at each other and then start laughing. We don't really help each other in the classroom. But, after school we'll ask each other for help," McKenna Roth said. Photo by Aiden Roth



## Learn Better TOGETHER

REPORTING BY AIDEN ROTH AND CAROLYN HECKLE

*With the ever increasing number of COVID-19 cases in the area, the Roth and Loeber twins find ways to work and learn from home together*

**56-57** OCT. 26-NOV. 1 DESIGN BY ALEX BEHN  
Steuben County Yellow Zone, Siblings on Remote Learning

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Job # 13975 School C-PP HS

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