



**For Immediate Release**  
11/18/21

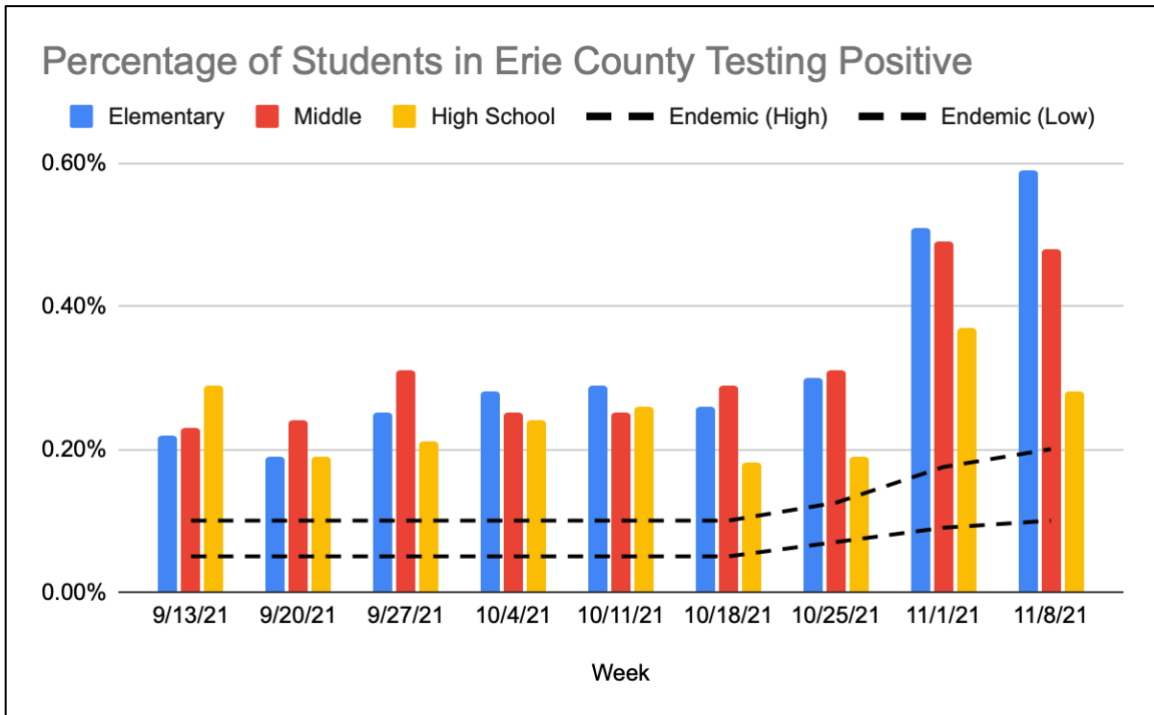
## WNY EDUCATION ALLIANCE CALLS FOR SCHOOLS TO REMAIN OPEN

**(Buffalo, NY – November 18, 2021)** In an effort to improve transparency, WNY Education Alliance has created a public database which tracks Covid cases in all school districts in Erie County and quarantines for those districts that report the data.

To access the database, please follow the link below:

<https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/e/2PACX-1vSw52NAaTglXtD0CcVRjTssfGHpxbUJfLdSUJ2TRLKzaCxKW5EtAt2HvPbgIZjMTq0zQX7gef uCOqUu/pubhtml>

The chart below shows the trends in Covid cases among school-aged children in Erie County.



Source: WNY Education Alliance, NYSDOH, School Websites



Below are a few key observations:

- **There has been a recent increase in cases.** Positive cases among elementary school-aged children have increased from 2-3 per 1,000 students per week in September/October to 5-6 per 1,000 students per week in the first two weeks of November.
- **The increase in positive cases has been less meaningful for middle school-aged students, possibly due to higher vaccination rates.** Positive cases for middle school-aged children have increased from 2-3 per 1,000 students per week to 4-5 per 1,000 students per week recently.
- **There has not been a substantial increase in cases among high school-aged students, which likely reflects the higher vaccinations rates among older students.** Positive cases have remained relatively stable at roughly 2-3 per 1,000 students per week.
- **It is important to point out that transmission rates are much higher in age groups that have lower vaccination rates.** Positive cases among children aged 5-11-years old are 2x greater than positive cases among older students that are more vaccinated. This is another datapoint which suggests that the vaccine is effective in reducing (not eliminating) transmission and limiting severe illness. *WNY Education Alliance recommends that parents consult with their pediatricians if they have questions about the vaccine.*
- **It is also critically important to point out that transmission rates in schools appear to be exceptionally low.** Positive cases among children did not increase materially during the first two months of the school year, even with the emergence of the more contagious Delta variant. **The importance of this finding, particularly as it relates to the need to keep schools open, cannot be emphasized enough.** Indeed, mitigations appear to be working in schools. WNY Education Alliance believes that test-to-stay programs would add an additional layer of safety while allowing healthy students to continue to attend school.
- **The recent increase in positive cases among school-aged children appears to be driven by indoor gatherings outside of school with the onset of cold weather.** Positive cases among children only rose in November when colder weather likely drove social gathering indoors. Similar trends have also been observed in other cold regions, including areas with high vaccination rates such as Vermont. So, while the absolute level of transmission appears to be driven in part by vaccination rates, the overall trend in positivity rates is being driven by weather and the resulting increase in gatherings in settings where mitigations are not practiced.
- **The recent increase in cases reflects the normal seasonality of a virus which is now endemic.** It is likely that Covid will continue to spread even after most people have been vaccinated or infected with the virus. In a world in which Covid is endemic, it should be expected that transmission rates will increase during the winter, much like the flu. In short, public policies, especially those related to schools,



need to incorporate normal seasonal fluctuations in illness. To that end, WNY Education Alliance has attempted to compare current case rates in the chart above with a range of positivity rates that may be expected going forward. We believe that this is a more appropriate framework for thinking about a virus which will likely remain endemic.

- **With 5-11-year-olds now being vaccinated, positive cases should begin to decline over the next few months.** WNY Education Alliance expects that positive cases for elementary school-aged students will converge with positive cases among older children as vaccination rates increase.
- **There is absolutely no reason to close schools again this year.** The data clearly shows that transmission rates in schools are extremely low. Thus, closing schools will not slow transmission rates among children since most transmission is occurring outside of school.
- **School closures will only hurt children for a third-straight year.** Governor Hochul finally acknowledged the significant harm that was caused by unnecessary school closures over the last two years. Children cannot afford to have another school year disrupted now that we understand: 1) the damage that has been done by prolonged school closures, and 2) that schools are not a meaningful source of transmission.

**If government officials are serious about protecting the health of children and keeping students in school, they should keep schools open and implement test-to-stay programs immediately.** Closing schools will do nothing to reduce transmission rates in the community and will only cause more harm to students and families in WNY.

Instead of closing schools for a third straight year, we need our public health officials and elected representatives to continue to support vaccination programs and implement test-to-stay programs to keep kids in school safely.

Closing schools once again, for no scientific reason, is simply not acceptable. It is punitive and discriminatory and will only serve to exacerbate the educational inequities which have already been exposed by Covid-19.

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#### **WNY Education Alliance**

WNY Education Alliance is a non-partisan organization committed to improving education in the Western New York area through advocacy, community engagement, and strategic partnerships.