March 13, 2020

Dear Hastings Community Members,

We’re received many notes from you in the past 48 hours regarding COVID-19. Some are imploring us to close schools and wondering why we haven’t already. Some are thankful that we’ve kept the schools open as we dynamically assess a fluid situation. We want you to know that we hear you. We understand the logic and concern behind each of your perspectives. And we understand the anxiety you’re all feeling. We’re feeling it too.

We’ve been making decisions with guidance from a broad cross-section of agencies and experts. These include The New York State Department of Health, The Westchester County Health Department, Governor Cuomo’s office, and our district physician. Mayor Armacost and I have also been in contact and she has shared guidance from contacts in higher education who are having to make similar decisions. Additionally, I’ve personally reached out to members of our community with backgrounds in medicine and public health, one of whom discussed our situation with a former head of the Center for Disease Control yesterday.

In a nutshell—and frustratingly—advice from the experts comes down to this: without a confirmed case in our schools, they don’t have clear guidance. They see it both ways. The official guidance from The New York Dept of Health (p.6) continues to be to wait for a confirmed case before closing. And as Dr. Henning-Piedmonte has noted, only the Governor can make the call to close schools for an extended period of time outside of that.

I surmise we will hear more on these issues today. The NY Dept of Health may change its guidance. The Governor may make the call to close schools in certain areas. One thing seems undeniable; our schools will be closing at some point in the near future. If the powers that be don’t make the call, the board will consider making it ourselves and deal with the potential fallout later. Several districts in our areas have chosen to take this path.

Please rest assured that the NUMBER ONE priority in all our decision making is the health of our children, staff, and community.

You will hear from us within the next 24 hours.

Best Regards,

Doug Sundheim, President

on behalf of the Board of Education

Past updates re Coronavirus on the hohschools website can be found HERE