March 15, 2020

Dear Hastings Families and Colleagues,

It has come to our attention this afternoon that a Hastings student lives in a home where relatives tested positive for COVID-19. As a result, we are closing schools effective tomorrow, March 16, 2020. We are saddened by this news in our community and are hoping for the best outcomes for our student and their family members. Students, staff, and parents will not be allowed to enter the schools until we officially re-open. The schools will be disinfected and sanitized again according to the NYSDoH guidelines. As you may have also heard in the news, we anticipate that County Executive George Latimer will make an announcement of school closures in Westchester. We expect details will be available tomorrow at which point we will likely know the duration of the extended closing.

While our teachers will not be able to work together tomorrow in their schools as we had planned, they can communicate with each other remotely to finalize the materials, assignments, and resources in Google Classroom. Our students and parents can expect to hear directly from teachers by Tuesday, March 17, 2020, with information related to Google Classroom. Additional information will be provided tomorrow as well about what teachers will be doing to ensure that there is a continuation of learning.

We are working with our food service providers to determine how to best meet the needs of our students who qualify for free and reduced lunch as well as any of our families who are food insecure. In light of our need to close schools tomorrow, we will distribute Foodtown gift cards, provided through grants from the Hastings PTSA, Family to Family and the Youth Council, to families who participate in the free and reduced breakfast and lunch meal program. We thank these organizations for their generosity. Ms. Maureen Caraballo, our Business Official, will be able to issue these gift cards to families on Wednesday, March 18, 2020, and will be in contact with families. We apologize in advance for any hardship that this change may cause.
In light of the closing of our schools, our Board of Education meeting scheduled for Monday, March 16, 2020, will be a conference call rather than an in-person meeting. GoToMeeting will be used to access the meeting. The information about participating in the conference call will be available on our website tomorrow. If you have questions, please contact Ms. Jeanine Genauer, the District Clerk.

With the school buildings closed, it is also important to think about what “social distancing” means for families, children, and adolescents who are home. This is going to be an extraordinary challenge since our natural inclination is for our children and their friends to spend time away from school together. Families are going to have to do their best, understanding that this will not be easy.

We have some excellent guidance shared with us from a Public Health Doctor in Boston:

1. **No playdates, parties, sleepovers, or families visiting each other's houses.**
   
   This sounds extreme because it is. The idea is to create distance between family units and between individuals across those family units. The symptoms of the COVID-19 Coronavirus take 4-5 days to manifest themselves. Someone who comes over to your home looking well can transmit the virus. Sharing food is particularly risky and it is definitely not recommended that people do so outside of their family.

2. **Take walks/runs outside, but maintain distance (ideally 6 feet between people outside your family).** Try not to use public facilities like playground structures as the COVID-19 Coronavirus can live on plastic and metal for up to 3 days, and these structures aren’t getting regularly cleaned. Try not to have physical contact with people outside of your family. Going outside will be important during these strange times, and the weather is improving. Go outside every day if you can but stay physically away from others. Try not to have kids play with each other (even outside) if that means direct physical contact.

3. **If you are sick, definitely stay home and contact a medical professional.** If you are sick, you should try to isolate yourself from the rest of your family within your house as best as you can. If you have questions about whether you qualify or should get a COVID-19 Coronavirus test, you can call your primary care doctor or team. Don't just walk into an ambulatory clinic - call first. Obviously, if it is an emergency call 911.

Clearly, all of this is difficult but everyone is trying their best and supporting each other in these efforts is critical.
We appreciate your patience and support as we continue to wait for more specific information regarding the duration of the closure of our schools. Once in receipt of this guidance, we will provide this in tomorrow’s update. Developments are occurring rapidly and we want to be able to provide the most accurate information possible.

Warm regards,

Valerie Henning-Piedmonte