

Superintendent's Update on COVID-19 - March 11, 2020

On March 3, I released a memo to our Teaneck Public Schools community to discuss the Coronavirus (COVID-19). In this memo, I noted that my leadership team is regularly monitoring alerts from the Center of Disease Control (CDC), and working closely with our State and local agencies and health departments, and the New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE). I also provided the CDC's guidance on preventive actions to take in order to stay healthy.

Then on March 5, I informed our parents/guardians and staff that we received notification from an adult contracted by our district that they had received a letter from their child's non-district school that it had closed due to possible COVID-19 exposure. Although this person had indirect ties to the closed school, out of an abundance of caution, we asked that adult to stay home for the next few days.

Also on March 5, the NJ Department of Education requested guidance from all districts on how we will continue working towards the State's 180-day requirement via home instruction **if** we are required by the State or the Teaneck Health Department to close any of our schools or district offices for an extended period (up to 14 days).

In order to submit this plan to the NJDOE, I announced (on March 6) that we would have a half-day session for students on March 10 (yesterday) to provide a three-hour professional development window for our faculty and support staff to prepare lesson plans of core content areas (English Language Arts, Math, Social Studies and Science) that will satisfy the required 10-hour home instruction per week. Plans for students with special needs and English Language Learners (ELL) would also be addressed.

On March 9, I issued a second memo to all staff reminding everyone of what I had shared in my March 3 memo, and added how we are taking extra steps to clean our schools and district offices. I also noted my expectations of what would take place during our March 10 professional development sessions. Our Principals distributed this memo during their staff meetings held on March 9.

That evening (March 9), the Governor declared a State of Emergency/Public Health Emergency, effective immediately, across all 21 counties, in order to ramp up New Jersey's efforts to contain the spread of the new coronavirus. He confirmed that Teaneck had two presumptive positive cases. As of today, that number has risen to three who are being monitored at various NJ hospitals.

Also today, the World Health Organization's Director-General declared the coronavirus outbreak a “pandemic” as the global death toll rose above 4,300 and the number of confirmed cases exceeded 120,000. Over the past 48 hours, health care institutions, universities, workplaces, and senior centers are changing routines in an intensive effort to slow down the spread of the coronavirus. This includes Teaneck Township per the press release they issued this morning. Still it is important to note that very few public K-12 schools in NJ have closed at this point, as we are not comprised of what the CDC considers high-risk populations.

This is a very challenging time and anxiety is running high - across the country and in our community. However, as this district’s Superintendent, it is **my** responsibility to ensure that the students and staff of Teaneck Public Schools remain healthy and safe.

Students, staff, parents and any event attendees are asked to please stay home if you are exhibiting any signs of the flu or any respiratory symptoms. **Parents and guardians should also consider making plans for any childcare needs *just in case* we need to close a school or schools - which would include closing our aftercare (SACC) program.**

Should we need to close for an extended period of time, we are diligently reviewing all of our district operations to ensure continued management of critical services ranging from food distribution to children in need to our payroll operations.

We all need to remain calm but diligent in our quest to limit exposure or spread of COVID-19. To that end, I requested that all of our principals send me a list of any activities taking place between now and spring break that are either an event, which is open to the public, or a field trip that requires busing. I also asked our Athletics Supervisor to provide me with a full schedule of athletic events for all of our spring teams.

The activities lists we received are extensive and impact every school. This is why, effective immediately, I am taking what I deem to be appropriate actions to postpone any out of State field trips between now and April 13, and to postpone the presentation of our upcoming High School play, *Chicago*, until late May. Additionally, I am reviewing all upcoming events that will congregate large audiences as well as after school activities from community organizations who use our schools for their events. Decisions about these and any events that will take place before or after spring break will be made on a day-to-day basis.

Please be assured that the district will be notified of any presumptive positive cases from the Teaneck Township, and residents should follow the Town’s website for the most up-to-date information: <https://www.teanecknj.gov/>.

If any decisions are made about our schools, or if we release any related information, we ask that everyone follow the homepage of the district's website - www.teaneckschools.org (under Our Latest News, and the Parent or Superintendent's Reports tabs) or visit their school's website. We ask that in order to respond to you in a timely manner, please limit calls to the district office and call either your child's school or the **New Jersey Department of Health's 24-hour telephone hotline for residents who may have concerns or questions: 800-222-1222.**

In closing, I want to thank my leadership team and all of our faculty and support staff who have worked very hard over this past week. Our focus has been on the safety of all, and the continued education of our children. This is a trying time; but I am confident that we will get through this as we always do - together.

I will continue to keep the Board, our staff, and our families updated of any new information regarding this health issue.

Thank you.

Dr. Christopher Irving, Superintendent