

March 3, 2020

A message to staff and families about coronavirus and our schools

It wasn't long ago that "COVID-19" would have been a strange, meaningless set of letters. However, in a very short time, coronavirus (COVID-19), has seemingly taken over our world. As your school superintendent, I would like to give you a view from the school district perspective so that you can gain insight about our approach to this pandemic.

Hours and hours are being consumed with meetings, on-line meetings, teleconferences and daily updates. The purpose of all of this is to keep us informed and ready for whatever may be emerging as the next stage. In turn, one of our obligations to you is to assist in sharing the information and/or the sources of our information so that you know what we do. In our posts, websites, and messages you will see a steady flow of information and best practices. One example would be the school district notices to you and throughout the schools about handwashing. The health departments and agencies continue to stress the importance of that prevention technique, and we in turn try to share that with all.

A second major obligation is to recognize the part we can play in assisting the health agencies. In a public health crisis, we are obligated to carry out the directives and policies of these agencies regarding prevention and response. At this time, the message to school districts is clear – stay calm and do not overreact.

A great example of this can be seen in the question of face masks. The health department is direct in their message that face masks should be reserved for the ill and for the hospitals, and they are of little benefit for prevention. Thus, you do not see schools trying to fit staff or children with masks.

Another highly apparent obligation is to continue our normal functions to every extent possible. Changes of school schedules and closures are highly disruptive to the whole community system. It has been pointed out that school closure literally disables the ability of some health care workers – nurses, doctors, professionals – to report to work because they must stay home to attend to their own children. Issues of quarantines and isolation are policy directives from the health department and should not be made by schools or by school superintendents. The pressure to "do something" often leads to local decisions that are not necessary or even helpful.

Although we recognize the element that fear of infection can play, we will try to remain calm, keep school open, keep students in attendance and keep staff at work unless specifically directed otherwise. Closing schools, cancelling events, directing individuals to stay home, tracking recent travelers, and similar actions aimed at isolating possible sources is simply not our function nor within our expertise.

By and large, it is my belief that schools do not have the capacity to close our doors and still educate children through technology. The system itself is not at that level of sophistication, and our staff do not have the basic tools or training. If we close schools the children lose something very valuable – education.

In short, we commit to you that we will continue to do our utmost to stay educated and current regarding the pandemic. We will keep you in the loop. We will be ready to act as we are directed, and we will not act in haste. At the bottom of this page you will find links to the latest resources for information and advice. Please take every precaution and stay safe.

Thank you,

Dr. Art Jarvis,
Superintendent

[Talking to Children about COVID-19: A Parent Resource](#)
[Tacoma Pierce County Health Department](#)
[COVID-19 Facts](#)

#WEarePSD

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