



10 March 2020

Dear Families:

Last night, I participated in a statewide conference call with Governor Lamont, Commissioner of Education Cardona, and numerous public officials from the Department of Public Health and Emergency Management. We discussed the state's plans to address COVID-19 both at present and in preparation for future possibilities. Although the Governor has not declared a "state of emergency," there are recommendations and guidelines for public agencies that have been developed for what is termed "slowing the transmission" of COVID-19. The universal precautions that have been recommended remain the same insofar as regular handwashing, staying home if you are sick, keeping surfaces clean, and covering coughs or sneezes (<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/about/prevention-treatment.html>).

In addition, though, "social distancing" has now been recommended as another method for slowing the transmission: refraining from holding or attending large events (those expected to bring more than 100 people) that would have people in close (shoulder-to-shoulder) contact. Likewise, of course, limiting unnecessary travel has been recommended.

As a school district, these updated recommendations for social distancing and limiting travel mean that we will cancel all field trips (our international trips were already canceled) for the immediate future (we cannot predict an exact date at present, because we are advised to continue monitoring the situation and communicating with the public health department). In addition, large school events such as concerts, plays, and athletics are currently under review to determine if they can be postponed to a later time or need to be canceled. We realize, of course, that this is difficult for our students who have been practicing for and are excited about these events; that said, while we are certainly not looking to create any more fear than we have present in media reports, we must exercise prudent caution by doing all we can to enact the recommendations of the Department of Public Health. Information on school-sponsored events will come directly to students and families from individual schools as we work together to determine feasibility of rescheduling to later dates (if possible) or cancellations, so please be certain to continue checking your Inbox.

I have been asked numerous times what our "policy" will be in directing families or staff who travel to areas with known risk of infection (designated as "Level 3" by the CDC <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/travelers/index.html>), particularly since our April break is approaching. Clearly, we cannot manage where all families or residents of town travel over break, nor can I require families to notify us of travel plans. That said, with employees, we can ask where they have recently traveled, and if they have traveled to an area designated "Level 3" (during or after their travel period), we will require them to remain out of work for a period of time, in conjunction with recommendations from our local and state departments of health. And although we cannot ascertain where all of our students have traveled, I ask that parents/guardians do inform school nurses' offices if you travel to any areas of known risk. When/if that happens, we will work with individual families and the Department of Public Health on the best course of action.

Avon Public Schools
Dr. Bridget Heston Carnemolla
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We will continue our daily deep cleaning of our facilities, including utilizing our new electrostatic misters (a high-powered chlorine-based disinfectant) to kill germs on surfaces such as desks, door handles, light switches and railings. Our crews have also received updated training on combatting the Coronavirus and effective cleaning methods (which again, mostly mimic our cleaning methods during flu season). Our staff and students will be reminded to wash hands throughout the day. Furthermore, staff at PGS and RBS will work with students to wash their hands upon arrival to school, before lunch, and after recess as a way to ensure that our youngest students are supervised in carrying out frequent handwashing.

Finally, it is important to note that I/we cannot predict whether any school closures would become necessary: such a determination would be made in conjunction with our local Farmington Valley Health Department, the State of CT Department of Public Health, and the State Department of Education. If such a closure did happen, we have been directed by the State Department of Education that we must exhaust all opportunities to meet the state law of 180 days of school. What this means is that we would have to "make up" any days of a closure in the same way that we do weather-related closures: we first add days on in June, through the 30th, then we take days from the April vacation. If and when making up school on these days would not equal 180 days during the 2019-2020 school year, we could seek a "waiver" from the State for the number of days we might be short. At this time, there are no other details on what that means, and if any of this were to happen we would share additional information, as necessary and available. I know you have seen reports of other districts engaging in "distance learning;" however, the State does NOT recommend this route because we are unable to program appropriately for any students who require additional related services, as required by state and federal law (examples include speech services, counseling services). Regardless, in an effort to be proactive in maintaining student connectedness to school, our teams are working to compile resources for students and families that can be accessed from home.

I appreciate your continued cooperation as we navigate this situation. Our goal is to maintain as much normalcy as possible for our students and staff, while exercising the preventative measures that we can to support the recommendations and directives we have been given. Numerous resources can be found online to assist in talking to children about COVID-19; the link found here has more updated information than some others we found, so I include it in case it is helpful to you: <https://www.nbcnews.com/better/lifestyle/how-talk-your-kids-about-coronavirus-ease-their-fears-ncna1129851>.

Please feel free to reach out to us with additional questions. Thank you for your continued support of our schools.

Sincerely,

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