

Dear AUSD Community and Staff:

With all the developments and concerns surrounding the coronavirus (COVID-19), and in particular its potential impact on our schools and the well-being of our students, I wanted to offer staff and families an update and also encourage you to consider and give some thought in advance to some of the possibilities we are thinking about and may be facing in the coming days.

While much of our thinking here is not yet finalized, I want families and staff to have some lead time in the event that we have to make some big decisions on short notice.

Cases and Current Situation

As of this evening there are no known cases of COVID-19 in our school district or within the City of Alameda. All reported concerns or reports of potential exposure have been immediately and thoroughly investigated in conjunction with the Alameda County Department of Public Health and again, as of this evening, there are no known issues with families having tested positive or even being under the recommended self-quarantine protocols. I say this knowing that this situation could shift rapidly, so I want to emphasize that our team is not in any way lessening our focus. In fact, we have spent the weekend monitoring and processing the latest guidance from state and county public health and education officials.

Cleaning and Operations

As a precautionary measure, we are investing in an expanded cleaning schedule across the district to ensure that the frequency of cleaning increases at all of our schools.

Over the weekend, with the help of 16 committed custodians, our maintenance team was able to safely clean every site, and almost every surface got a thorough wipe down. I send deep thanks and appreciation for these employees whose work is particularly critical at this time.

Our food services team has also made simple but important modifications to our service protocols to increase safety in that area. As an example, most food items are now being passed out by employees with sterile gloves rather than having students reach into bins, etc.

Events, Assemblies, and Field Trips

It is quite possible that an interim step before any school closure may be a temporary suspension or postponement of events like field trips, assemblies, performances, evening meetings, etc. Our team will be meeting tomorrow and focusing on this question, and we ask our community to start preparing for this possibility. I know first-hand how much work goes into planning and scheduling events and meetings or performances, so I am being very deliberate about this decision. I know that the inconvenience this will create is only acceptable given the current challenges to student safety and public health.

School Closures

Currently we are working in accordance with guidelines and recommendations from the Alameda County Department of Public Health and in consultation with the Alameda County Office of Education. At present, that guidance dictates that if a case of COVID-19 was confirmed in one of our schools we would close that school for likely 14 calendar days.

We also recognize that the evolving and somewhat unpredictable nature of this situation could lead us to close schools across the District if the situation worsened locally or if other developments increased the threat to student and community safety.

In light of this I am asking families to begin thinking about how they might handle a school closure that lasted close to two weeks. This is not the case at the moment, but given the possibility that things could change quickly we need to start thinking ahead as a community.

I fully realize how difficult this might be on families but in the absence of easy answers or solutions I at least want to get us all thinking ahead if circumstances change.

Developing Guidelines for Learning During School Closures

Our Chief Academic Officer, Sara Stone, and her team are working to create some guidelines for how we might support student learning during a closure using online learning, suggestions for independent reading and writing, teacher emailed assignments, and other activities. Obviously if an extended closure of schools becomes a reality we will work to provide whatever we can to maintain the best possible continuity for student learning.

Maintain Focus on Basic and Effective prevention Strategies

I realize you have heard these things before, but emphasizing and insisting on frequent hand washing and staying home when ill are among those basic strategies that have the highest potential to protect against the spread of this illness.

We are committed to following health officials' recommendations on best practices during this situation and also committed to keeping you informed of our thinking and actions via accurate and transparent communications. I hope some of this is helpful and our team will surely be focused on this issue and in communication with our staff and families as things develop.

Thank you for your support and interest as we address this issue together as a community.

Respectfully,

Pasquale Scuderi
Superintendent
Alameda Unified School District