March 6, 2020

Dear NCPS Community,

As anticipated, the news continues to unfold regarding COVID-19 locally, statewide, nationally, and internationally. As we continue to learn more, resources are being developed to help parents and families discuss the situation. In addition to what we sent earlier, the New York Times has written an informative piece, “Talking to Tweens and Teens about Coronavirus,” that could be helpful when communicating with middle and high school students.

Since becoming aware of the possible spread of COVID-19 in the US, we began immediately reacting to protect our students, staff, and schools. Simultaneously, we began proactively preparing for the continuation of education if the need for a long-duration shutdown were to arise. While our understanding of COVID-19 and the situation continues to rapidly evolve, the steps we have taken are serving us well to help ensure our buildings are clean, our students are practicing appropriate flu-prevention strategies, and our teachers and students are prepared to continue the teaching and learning experience, through the help of various forms of technology, regardless of the location.

In our buildings, we continue to follow our flu-season protocol for cleaning, which includes a deeper clean in common areas and if/when we are notified that a child has the flu in any of our classrooms. We have distributed disinfectant spray bottles and paper towels to all teachers, and have encouraged their liberal use throughout the day. We have also provided these supplies in the cafeterias, and are asking our staff to wipe down the tables after each lunch wave. When students are not in the buildings, we are continuing to clean all areas thoroughly, using effective cleaning supplies, to help keep our buildings healthy. As a further precaution, we are turning off the water fountains in our buildings, and will have bottled water available for students in the cafeterias.

The majority of our students use our buses, and we have focused on keeping them healthy and clean as well. Our bus terminal has sufficient hand sanitizer, disinfectant soaps, and disinfectant cleaners to perform daily cleaning of spaces within the terminals, helping keep our drivers safe. Additionally, school bus interior “high-traffic” surfaces, such as handrails, seat tops, and driver compartment areas, are being cleaned regularly with disinfectant sprays and disposable towels, and we have asked each driver to thoroughly wipe down his/her bus daily.

As students move throughout their day, we are taking steps to assist them in practicing proper flu prevention strategies. For example, we are regularly checking to ensure that our hand sanitizer stations are full, and we are using 60% alcohol solutions. Additionally, we have installed additional stations where appropriate, with a focus on congregation areas such as the main hallways and cafeterias. Teachers are also reminding and encouraging students to wash their hands often and properly, and are providing time for them to do so throughout the day.

As a further precaution, in light of the cases of COVID-19 in surrounding states, we are suspending all out of state fieldtrips for our students K-12. Although we realize the wonderful opportunities these experiences offer for our students, we nonetheless believe suspending out of state trips is an appropriate step given the increasing reports of COVID-19 in the states surrounding Connecticut.
We continue to encourage our students, staff, and families to follow the prevention strategies detailed by the CDC (https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/about/prevention-treatment.html). Importantly, we also urge students and staff who do not feel well to remain at home until they feel better and are fever-free for 24 hours without the assistance of Tylenol or Ibuprofen. Again, it is important to remember that we are still in the midst of a particularly intense Influenza season, and we can best protect ourselves and each other by following the guidelines and staying home if ill.

These practices and protocols have been implemented to help our students, staff, and schools remain healthy. Despite our best efforts in the schools, however, we also realize that the possibility exists for our schools to be ordered into a long-duration closing by the Health Department due to presence of COVID-19 in our community. Knowing this is a possibility, for the past few weeks our outstanding curriculum team, building administrators, district administrators, and technology teams have been working to build the infrastructure in preparation for this scenario. Over the past week, our teachers began preparing on a classroom level, and I am quite proud to share that each classroom, in every building, will be prepared to provide a continued educational experience for our students if the long-duration scenario becomes a reality.

Building principals will send out more detailed information about the continuation plan in the future. In order to provide a routine for our students during a long-duration shutdown, principals have developed daily schedules at each grade level / school, which they will share if we do go into a closure. Additionally, the platforms teachers will be using for two-way communication with students would be,

- K – 3 teachers will communicate with their classes through parent emails
- 4 – 8 teachers will communicate with their classes through Google Classroom
- 9 – 12 teachers will communicate with their classes through Schoology, Google Classroom, and/or Digication

Since all communications strategies rely on digital communications, I urge any family without sufficient technology resources to contact your building principal to let him/her know of your needs. In the event of a long-duration shutdown, we will endeavor to provide needed equipment to families to ensure that ALL students, in EVERY class, are able to access the educational experiences provided by their teachers. We strongly believe this is our responsibility, and we are proud to do whatever it takes to ensure 100% participation with this program.

While nothing is better than students and teachers together in their classrooms experiencing the wonder and joy of learning together, we are confident that our efforts preparing for this possible scenario will yield great benefits for our students if a long-duration shutdown becomes necessary. While we are all hoping for the best, we are also preparing for every scenario. While doing so, we are committed to doing all that we can to continue providing a world-class educational experience for all of our students.

My very best,

Bryan

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