

Dear Merrimack Families and District Staff~

Throughout this experience of COVID-19 our school district, our town, your families and friends, and all of you have been deeply impacted by its effects. Some days have been hard. Some days have been less so. But all days have seen their share of challenges, expected and unexpected, and we have all had to learn to adapt as quickly and as efficiently as possible to everything thrown our way. Over the last day or so, our district has had to adapt again as we faced another difficult reality brought on by this crisis.

As you probably know by now, one of our nighttime high school custodians tested positive for COVID-19. He began to feel unwell last Wednesday, April 29<sup>th</sup>. Following all recognized guidelines, he did not return to work after that, or since. He was tested for COVID-19 on Saturday and shared with his supervisors yesterday, immediately after he heard back from his doctor, that he had, indeed, tested positive. He remains at home under his doctor's care. As with all virus sufferers, he is in our thoughts as he begins his recovery. The challenge this presents to the district, of course, is the need to assess the possibility of transmission from this individual to any others in our employ. Fortunately, our school buildings have been vacant, except for custodial staff and limited food service staff only at the high school, for the last several weeks, significantly limiting the possibility of widespread transmission. However, despite the district's strict adherence to all known prevention protocols it is not possible to ensure with a comfortable degree of certainty that this individual did not transmit to any other individual with whom he may have come in contact either directly or indirectly.

As a consequence of this uncertainty we determined that the most responsible course of action would be to assess every possible point of contact, however indirect, and ask those potential points of contact to refrain from working for a period of two weeks. In assessing this possible web of connections, it became clear that our current food service program, structured as it is as a partnership between the maintenance department and food services department, might be another possible point of contact, however unlikely and distant that connection may be. Therefore, and out of an abundance of caution (a phrase we have all heard so often lately) we have temporarily suspended our highly successful remote school lunch program. It is our hope and expectation that after the necessary 14 day isolation period our maintenance and food service staff will all be cleared to return to their duties at which time we will most happily resume our program. It is at times like these when we appreciate more than ever the work and effort of those whom we rely on to provide truly essential services. I am more grateful now than I have ever been for our maintenance and food service staff for all their hard and dedicated service to our district and I eagerly await their quick and safe return.

During their temporary absence, our remote lunch program will be handled by a caterer we have contracted with who will provide daily lunch to our Merrimack families until our normal operations can continue. Given their need to scale up with very little notice, we will resume our lunch program on Thursday, May 7<sup>th</sup>. The only significant difference to our previous schedule will be the daily start time. Instead of 10:30, we will begin service at 11:00 at the high school location. Bus delivery will continue as before.

Despite our collective desire for all things to return to normal, incidents like this drive home the fact that we are not yet able to achieve this goal. In the meantime, we will continue to do our best to provide the services on which our families and students rely, despite the daily challenges we face that make that service delivery difficult. With thanks for your patience and understanding, with good will and best wishes for a swift return to health for our employee, and with appreciation to this strong and resilient community for all its support, I wish you all continued good health.

Stay well.

Mark McLaughlin  
Superintendent