

Dear Merrimack Families~

I am writing you this afternoon with news that the Merrimack School District will be closed from Monday, March 16 through Friday, March 20 due to COVID-19. This closure is precautionary only. However, after consultation with colleagues in neighboring districts, all of whom have worked hard, as we have, to navigate through this unprecedented and very difficult situation, many of us formed a consensus to close our schools for a period of time in order to evaluate the progress of this illness throughout our region and to provide opportunities for students and their families to work through their own processes for safety and health monitoring.

This decision does not come lightly. I am acutely aware of the importance of school in the lives of so many people in our community. For students, the many services our schools provide, in addition to the underappreciated benefits of routine and the security that comes with that, this may well be a very difficult time. For families, I am acutely aware of childcare challenges this will present and other implications of this decision, and recognize the hardship this places on many of you.

At this moment, our district leadership team is working, as it has been doing for some time, to prepare for instructional support in the context of remote learning. Toward that end, I share the following schedule:

Monday, no one will report to work EXCEPT principals, assistant principals, central office staff, and custodians. Administrators will use Monday to continue developing their plans for remote learning and custodians will clean and disinfect all school buildings.

On Tuesday, all personnel will return to work and will develop and execute their plans for remote learning for students. At that time, additional directions will be provided to families from their home school administrative teams about what this remote instruction will look like, how it can be accessed, and how it will be maintained.

On Wednesday, the Merrimack School District will begin remote learning for our students, and this will continue through next Friday, the 20th, at a minimum. Since this is a dynamic and rapidly changing situation, it may become necessary to extend our district's period of closure beyond Friday the 20th. Since it is simply not possible to forecast how long school closures may be necessary in this current environment, we will review this situation on a week to week basis.

As of 6 pm this evening, all Merrimack School District facilities will be closed to evening activities until further notice. Again, we recognize the immense inconvenience this poses for our community partners, so many of whom use our facilities for countless events and activities. However, as a precaution, our school buildings must remain safe spaces for our educators so that they can provide the best education we can give to our students at this extraordinary time.

I have no doubt that you may have many questions. We have them as well since there is no precedent for an event like COVID-19 in our recent history. We will use our district websites and media platforms to provide the most current information we can as we progress through the next week, and beyond. Please rely on those sources of information, as well as verified sources like the CDC, NH DHHS, and your own medical provider for answers to questions you may have about COVID-19 or the district's response to it. As I am sure you are aware, there are many ways for

inaccurate or incomplete information to travel and confuse all of us in this difficult time. I urge you to seek information from reliable sources as you seek answers to your questions.

Finally, despite all the questions and uncertainty right now, I want to reassure you that we take our responsibility to provide safety and quality education to the students of Merrimack very seriously. In the final analysis, it is our most solemn obligation. I wish you all well as we navigate through this challenge together as a community, and I thank you for the partnership you will provide to our educators and administrators as they work to provide the best education they can to your students.

Sincerely,

Mark McLaughlin

Superintendent