

South Lewis Central School District

Mr. Douglas Premo, Superintendent

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Dear South Lewis Community-

I hope this communication finds you well. 2020 has been a trying year for many with endless challenges. Unfortunately, COVID-19 is not behind us just yet.

In Lewis County we have been fortunate to have strong, consistent and collaborative relationships with other school districts, government officials, the healthcare system and Public Health. On a regular basis we meet and discuss the status and state of each of our respective areas. Earlier this week we met and learned of the over 150 cases of COVID-19 in Lewis County since October 19th (with over 30 new cases since the weekend alone). Along with the knowledge of this dramatic increase in cases that show little signs of slowing, we also learned that the local hospital/healthcare and COVID-19 testing system have already begun to be stressed. By all metrics, Lewis County qualifies for status as a "Red Zone" in the New York State micro-cluster strategy. We have, however, avoided being labeled thus far due to "soft" factors such as strong contact tracing.

Schools have been remarkably successful despite this significant community spread and infection rate. We have put in place and followed the protocols of social distancing, mask wearing, hand hygiene and routine cleaning and disinfecting. It has been the efforts of our faculty, staff and students while on campus, and our parents/families at home, that have set the tone and made the difference. To date not a single transmission of COVID-19 in Lewis County can be traced to a school. We, as a school community, are to be applauded.

Despite our school success, the overall community at-large has been less successful. While COVID-19 does not discriminate and can infect anyone, the less than ideal actions of some in the community has resulted in community spread. It is because of this community spread, and the subsequent outcomes as outlined above, that Lewis County, the Lewis County Healthcare System and Lewis County Public Health have urged and recommended school districts to close in-person instruction and go to a fully remote model for an extended period of time. This recommended closure, while somewhat preventative in nature, is in response to the very real situation our community is currently experiencing that could easily and quickly spin in a dangerous and scary direction. COVID-19 in our community is not merely a possibility, but rather has arrived and is very real.

We strongly contend that the best place for students to learn is in-person. Our students need to be in our classrooms. However, the health and safety of all must be at the forefront of our decision-making. When such a recommendation to close for an extended period is made to school districts by these community partners, we must be thoughtful and serious in giving it full consideration. **Therefore, the District is considering closing in-person instruction and going to a fully remote model from approximately Thanksgiving Break through January 19, 2021.** This closure would extend through the holiday season, when we know many will be traveling and spending time with family and friends, and the two-week probable transmission and quarantine period following.

I need to stress that no decision has been made. However, I also want to ensure that all are informed in regards to the discussions taking place. While the ground under us never seems to steady, and timelines are often deviated from, it is our hope to work to make a decision by the middle of next week.

If we make the decision to close, or are forced to close for other reasons, it will have an impact on many. We are neither ignorant nor numb to these impacts. We understand the educational implications, emotional toll, childcare struggles, and employment/financial ramifications, to just name a few. It is for these reasons that we wanted to provide you with this communication and will work to give advance notice, if and when possible.

During these trying times we will continue to communicate and put the health and safety of our entire school community in the forefront. We are thinking of you all. Be well and be safe.

Sincerely,



Douglas Premo
Superintendent of Schools