

March 12, 2020

Dear SBRSD School Community,

As information regarding Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) proves to be ever-changing, the District leadership team and key officials continue to meet daily to discuss mitigation efforts and the safety of our school and greater community.

As promised, I am writing with the latest information available to us regarding the Coronavirus. Late Tuesday afternoon, Governor Baker declared a State of Emergency for Massachusetts and provided information on operations of the Executive Branch as well as relayed information on public schools from the Commissioner. At the time of his broadcast, there were 92 presumptive positive cases in Massachusetts, 7 of which were in Berkshire county. Of the 92, 70 cases were related to the Biogen population, 4 were related to travel, and 18 were still under investigation. A Presumptive Positive Case of COVID-19 is someone who met the [Centers for Disease Control \(CDC\) risk assessment criteria](#) for testing and their test came back from the state laboratory as positive for COVID-19. The person then isolates at home and household and other close contacts may be subsequently tested. Already the numbers of presumptive positives in total have increased for the state as of this writing. Governor Baker's emergency declaration urges the public to avoid all out-of-state and international trips, and to limit large group gatherings. He also conveyed the Commissioner's position on the 180-day school requirement to be as follows:

#### **180 School Day Requirement:**

In light of concerns about possible school closings for public health reasons, I have updated DESE's guidance about the requirement for 180 days of school to provide relief to districts. (*Note: The Department will continue to revisit this guidance if the situation warrants it.*):

1. All days lost to health, weather, or safety emergencies between the **first day of the school year and March 15** must be made up by rescheduling full school days to ensure a 180-day school year.
2. All days lost to health, weather, or safety emergencies between **March 16 and June 1** must be made up to ensure a 180-day school year or until the district has reached **its previously scheduled 185th day**, whichever comes first. If all five snow days have been used prior to this point, the district is not required to schedule additional school days.
3. Districts will not be expected to make up any days lost to health, weather, or safety emergencies that occur **after June 1**.

This change means that if you have already canceled school for five days before March 15, you do not need to schedule additional make-up days for any days that school is closed after March 15. **The longest that any school district will be required to go is its scheduled 185th day. No schools will be required to be in session after June 30.** This policy applies to the current (2019-20) school year only.

Also, we have been informed that we have a parent who is being self-quarantined due to their nature of their employment by the Department of Health. Quarantine in general means the separation of a person or group of people reasonably believed to have been exposed to a communicable disease but not yet symptomatic, from others who have not been so exposed, to prevent the possible spread of the communicable disease. There has been no change in that status that has been communicated to the schools.

Currently, we are following the CDC's "Interim Guidance for Administrators of US Childcare Programs and K-12 Schools to Plan, Prepare, and Respond to Coronavirus Disease 2019," which provides resources and instructs school leaders to:

1. Review, update, and implement emergency operations plans (EOPs).
2. Develop information-sharing systems with partners.
3. Monitor and plan for absenteeism.
4. Establish procedures for students and staff who are sick at school.
  - *"Remember that schools are not expected to screen students or staff to identify cases of COVID-19. The majority of respiratory illnesses are not COVID-19. If a community (or more specifically, a school) has cases of COVID-19, local health officials will help identify those and will follow up on next steps."*
5. Perform routine environmental cleaning.
6. Create communications plans for use with the school community.
7. Review CDC's guidance for businesses and employers.

The most important information for you to know is the following: **We have no confirmed cases of COVID-19 in the Southern Berkshire Regional School District. Local health officials will continue to take actions as warranted by the evidence collected and remain in consultation with the Massachusetts Department of Public Health, and the Center for Disease Control.** We all know how fluid this situation is, and we continue to stay in close communication with our local agencies for any new information or guidance. I want to be sure everyone has the necessary information of what the schools are doing in relation to preventive measures:

- Our maintenance crews are doing a great job staying keeping the facilities safe and clean. The Maintenance Department has ordered and delivered disinfectants and supplies across our school buildings. They are disinfecting all major touch points including door handles, sinks, toilets, paper towel dispensers, water fountains, and cafeteria tables. The chemicals used are EPA registered and will kill Coronavirus and will drastically help prevent the spread of the virus through surface contact.
- We have directed all school administrators to continue to reinforce proper handwashing.

- We are discouraging the use of masks at the recommendations of the CDC and DPH as they are not effective as well as cause children to bring their hands to their faces to adjust the mask.
- The District has developed a draft of a Pandemic Plan that continues to be a fluid document as more guidance becomes available.
- We have sent an email to parents providing strategies of ways to speak with children about this situation without causing any additional anxiety. We have created a resource and communication page on our website @ <https://www.sbrsd.org/covid-19.html>.

As a reminder, students and staff who are sick are encouraged to stay home, and the district will continue to respond to these situations with flexibility.

***We can't stress enough.....Handwashing Protocols (per CDC Guidelines)***

Washing your hands is easy, and it is one of the most effective ways to prevent the spread of germs. We continue to reinforce hand washing protocols with all members of our school community. Our educators, administrators, and support staff have done an excellent job modeling and reinforcing these messages.

When should you wash your hands? You can help yourself and your loved ones stay healthy by washing your hands often, especially during these key times when you are likely to get and spread germs:

- Before, during, and after preparing food
- Before eating food
- Before and after caring for someone at home who is sick with vomiting or diarrhea
- Before and after treating a cut or wound
- After using the toilet
- After changing diapers or cleaning up a child who has used the toilet
- After blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing
- After touching an animal, animal feed, or animal waste
- After handling pet food or pet treats
- After touching garbage

Five Steps to Wash Your Hands the Right Way: Clean hands can stop germs from spreading from one person to another and throughout an entire community—from your home and workplace to childcare facilities and hospitals. Follow these five steps **every** time:

1. **Wet** your hands with clean, running water (warm or cold), turn off the tap, and apply soap.
2. **Lather** your hands by rubbing them together with the soap. Lather the backs of your hands, between your fingers, and under your nails. (Don't forget your thumbs!)
3. **Scrub** your hands for at least 20 seconds. Need a timer? Hum the "Happy Birthday" song from beginning to end twice.

4. **Rinse** your hands well under clean, running water.
5. **Dry** your hands using a clean towel or air dry them.

Washing hands is the most effective way to clean your hands. If you are unable to wash your hands, you can use a hand sanitizer that has at least 60% alcohol content. How to use hand sanitizer:

1. Apply the gel product to the palm of one hand (read the label to learn the correct amount).
2. Rub your hands together.
3. Rub the gel over all the surfaces of your hands and fingers until your hands are dry. This should take around 20 seconds.

Tomorrow morning, we are to receive guidance from the State which I plan to share as soon as I am able. Also, the South County Superintendents are meeting to discuss next steps regionally tomorrow morning. As a mom, daughter, and Superintendent of Schools, I know this is a very unsettling time for many of us. We truly understand your concerns and will continue to do our very best to share any and all information we have with you in a timely manner.

Please keep an eye out for additional updates and communications. As always, you can contact us with questions or concerns, and we will do our best to respond.

Sincerely,

Beth Regulbuto, M.Ed., SFO  
Superintendent of Schools