



HAMILTON COMMUNITY SCHOOLS
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903 S. WAYNE ST.
HAMILTON, IN 46742

March 13, 2020

Dear Hamilton Community School Families,

As I am certain you all know, the Coronavirus (COVID-19) is affecting our society in ways that we have not seen in many years. The virus is spreading quickly, and there are growing cases confirmed in our state, nation, and around the world. While we know that there are currently no confirmed cases in Dekalb or Steuben Counties, we are choosing to take a proactive approach at Hamilton Community Schools. This virus may not have serious implications for many individuals, but for others, the symptoms can be extremely serious.

This week, I have had several meetings and communicated with or received communication from our local health departments, the Indiana Department of Education, the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, and area school superintendents. The research clearly indicates that when a pandemic of this nature is happening, the most effective response is to proactively keep large groups of people from gathering. This approach, coupled with good hygiene and general healthy decisions, are effective in slowing or preventing the spread of these types of viruses. This is why you have seen a growing list of sporting events, concert, festivals, and other large events cancelled at this time. While there is much debate in the news and on social media regarding how serious this illness truly is, I have heard first hand from health professionals that this situation is indeed very serious, and not something to be ignored.

Yesterday, Governor Holcomb announced several new guidelines and options for the state's response to this pandemic. He has provided Indiana's public schools with the ability to use up to 20 waived days of school closure to help us adequately address this situation in our communities. We appreciate the Governor's response, and his decision to give schools new options to effectively address this concern and keep our school communities safe.

After considering all of the information that I have learned over the past few weeks, and daily monitoring all developments and numerous communications, I feel that it is the best decision at this time to proactively close our schools in the interest of the health and safety of our students, staff, and community. While we do not have any cases in our school district, we do not want to wait until that happens to make this decision. My hope is that by making this decision, we can proactively stay ahead of this virus and better protect our students, staff, and the community, and most importantly our most vulnerable populations.

In an effort to allow our staff time to finish preparations for this drastic change, we will be using the following schedule as it related to our closure:

eLearning Days for students will occur only on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays the weeks of:

- ◆ March 16—20
- ◆ March 30 - April 3
- ◆ April 6 - April 10

Mondays and Fridays we will use as waiver days. There will not be eLearning for students on these day, however it does allow for 2 additional days each week for students to complete the required assignments.

Teachers will report on Mondays during the shutdown to best prepare their lessons for our students.

As a reminder, Spring Break is the week of March 23 - 27. There will be no eLearning during this week.

CENTRAL OFFICE

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Katie Gaetz, Secretary

Please know that as a district, we take this decision very seriously, and we understand the challenges that this decision will create for families. While the decision regarding the closure may seem unnecessary or an overreaction by some, please know that the number one priority at all times is the safety and health of our students and community. As I stated earlier, our hope is that by being proactive and leveraging the waiver days and options that the Governor has provided for us, we will be able to minimize the impact of this illness on our students and community.

On a personal note, this is one of the most difficult decision I have had to make in my 26 years of education. It is difficult because I know the impact and disruption that it will have on our school families and community. However, I will always operate and make decisions that I believe are in the best interest of our students, staff, and community. As a leader, I am constantly reading inspiration quotes about leadership. I came across a quote from Theodore Roosevelt that I thought was very appropriate in these current days. He said, "In any moment of decision, the best thing is to do the right thing, the next best thing is to do the wrong thing, and the worst thing to do is nothing." I am choosing to do what I believe is in the best interest of our school community based on the information I have received.

In an effort to assist students who may be in need, we are providing the following services/opportunities:

- Lunch will be delivered to students in need to their home or caregiver's home, within school corporation boundaries between 10:30 a.m. and 11:30 a.m. Monday through Friday. If you feel that your child is in need of lunch during the weeks of March 16 – 20, March 30 – April 3, and April 6 – 10, please contact Hamilton Elementary School by 8:00 a.m. Monday, March 16 at 260-488-2101 or Hamilton Jr/Sr High School at 260-488-2161. Someone must answer the door for lunches to be delivered to the student/s.
- The building will be open on Monday, March 16 from 9:00 a.m. – 11:00 a.m. and 2:00 p.m. – 4:00 p.m. so that students and parents can get any needed items which might include: Electronic Device, Books, Medicine from the Nurses Office, or needed school supplies from locker.
- We are working diligently to install to external WIFI hotspots in the South parking lot nearest the elementary school and softball field. When installed, we will notify the school community and this will provide an opportunity for students without internet access the ability to download needed materials.
- If your family does not have internet access and you know that your child would best be served by receiving paper copies of eLearning assignments, please contact the elementary of jr/sr high school and we will make the necessary arrangements to get those to your child.

Thank you, as always, for you continued support of our schools. We appreciate you putting your trust in all of us for the safety and wellbeing of your children. Because this is a fluid situation, updates will continually be put on social media, our text messaging service system, and the school corporation website.

Yours in Education,



Anthony J. Cassel
Superintendent
Hamilton Community Schools