

MENDON-UPTON REGIONAL SCHOOL DISTRICT



We empower all learners to *thrive*.

March 15, 2020

To All in the MURSD Community:

Good evening. I hope all of you are safe and healthy. Late this afternoon Governor Charlie Baker announced a new series of measures that the state is putting in place to prevent the spread of the COVID-19 virus. Included in those measures is **the closure of all public K-12 schools in Massachusetts for the next three weeks**. Therefore, at a minimum, the MURSD will be closed until at least Tuesday, April 7. I know that for many, this is frustrating, but these are the measures that must be taken in this serious situation.

I would like to address the issue of "[social distancing](#)," i.e., the procedures such as "remaining out of congregate settings, avoiding mass gatherings, and maintaining distance (at least 6 feet) from others when possible." (CDC) These extreme measures must be taken to prevent sick people from coming in close contact with healthy people in order to reduce opportunities for disease transmission. Yesterday I shared on social media this article, [Social Distancing: This is Not a Snow Day](#) by Dr. Asaf Bitton, a primary care physician and a public health leader. Dr. Bitton makes the clear point that the whole point of social distancing is to drastically limit social space between individuals. I bring up this point because I have heard anecdotes about events within our community such as planned playdates, sleepovers, etc. where groups of our students will be congregating. PLEASE DO NOT DO THIS. The point of measures as drastic as school closures is to limit social interactions among kids. Please heed all of the warnings of all of the health professionals. Nothing is more important than the health of our students and their families.

We are actively exploring numerous options for online/remote learning opportunities for our students in the coming days. I will share plans with you very shortly.

Be well,

Dr. Joseph Maruszczak
Superintendent of Schools

March 13, 2020

To All in the MURSD Community:

Thank you for your ongoing patience and support as we navigate through the COVID-19 (Coronavirus) crisis. As always, supporting our students and families is our primary concern. I am writing to share the most current update with regard to this crisis. The national response to this pandemic has been very rapid and ever-changing by every hour. As superintendent, in real time I have been listening to the counsel of our local Boards of Health and the Massachusetts Department of Public Health (DPH) for their expertise to ensure the health and safety of our students and staff.

I have made the decision that **effective Monday, March 16, the Mendon-Upton Regional School District will be closed for a period of two weeks (through Friday, March 27)**. All classes as well as extracurricular activities, clubs, and sports, are suspended. All of our buildings will be closed with the exception of custodians who will be working to do a deep sanitizing of the facilities. Before March 27th, we will work with local and state officials to assess the status and efficacy of this closing. While there is still officially only one presumptive case in Worcester County, there are many instances of imposed and self-quarantines. Because of the paucity of readily available testing for the virus, there is a degree of uncertainty of the quantity of cases. This decision has been a collaborative one, and it is intended to be proactive and not reactive. Many public health experts have stated that we are in a period where there should be "proportional mitigation," i.e., a response to avoid a sustainable community spread. There is a growing body of research that supports proactive measures to stop any potential spreading.

Please realize that this two-week closure is being done on a regional basis, as all of the superintendents in the Blackstone Valley have been in close consultation. Potential infection does not discriminate among borders and we are all in agreement that a regional response is the most effective one. We agree that the two-week window will enable us to reassess the depth and breadth of the current COVID-19 threat. We continue to have confidence in the knowledge and leadership of our local and state health officials whose guidance and support we have relied on throughout this ever-changing situation. Although they have not directed us to close at this point, we - along with all public school districts across the Blackstone Valley - have decided to close school to ensure that we are acting proactively and in a way that supports the health and safety of our community.

I will be addressing more of the specifics with all of you very shortly, including the possible provisions of learning resources. As I stated in last night's update, the state Commission of Elementary & Secondary Education has relaxed the requirement on make-up days, and we will be required to attend only through Day 185 in our school calendar (which is June 22).

I am sorry for the disruptions to your usual routine and the inconvenience that this has or may cause. I also regret the heightened anxiety that this crisis is causing for many. However, these are extraordinary times and they call for proactive measures. I will be in touch with more details very shortly.

Sincerely,

Dr. Joseph Maruszczak
Superintendent of Schools

March 12, 2020

To All in the MURSD Community:

I am writing this evening to provide another update on the Coronavirus (COVID-19) situation that continues to be at the forefront of so many aspects of our daily life. It is a situation that is evolving seemingly every hour, so everything remains very fluid.

First, I am cognizant that there are some districts across the state that have made the decision to shut down for a period of time and others that have decided to close for a day for “deep cleaning.” Again, at this moment the advice of our local Boards of Health is to remain open, as there are no presumptive cases of the virus in our communities. Unfortunately, there have been some instances of rumors and misinformation which have been propagated in the community and at the high school. The health and safety of our students, parents, staff, and community is our top priority. We will continue to work with our public health officials to get their most up-to-date guidance and to take the necessary steps to support everyone’s health.

Our custodial staff will continue to be vigilant about sanitizing “high contact” areas throughout the building, including doorknobs, railings, switches, desks, etc. Additionally, our bus company, Tellstone & Son, is also taking precautions in sanitizing all contact areas on all buses.

Tomorrow all superintendents across the state have a 8:30 am conference call with officials from the Massachusetts Department of Public Health (DPH) and the Massachusetts Commissioner of Elementary & Secondary Education Jeff Riley. I am certain that further guidance will be shared and I will be sure to share with all of you what further information is offered.

Should the MURSD have to close down for a period of time, please be aware that Commissioner Riley has stated that all school districts would be held to only making up to day 185 in the school calendar (regardless for how many days missed). For the MURSD, day 185 is June 22. However, please realize that we have an approved ASL Day (Alternative Structured Learning) plan, which could enable some online and remote learning opportunities should we have cancellations. However, decisions on any school cancellations are still yet to be determined.

I am also cognizant of the heightened anxiety that may exist among our students and community members. Below are some resources with information and tips to help manage these anxieties.

[Tips for Managing Anxiety Related to the Coronavirus](#)

[Talking to Children About COVID-19: A Parent Resource](#)

I will send out another update tomorrow with additional information from the DPH, the Department of Education, and our local Boards of Health. The district remains committed to ensuring everyone's safety and keeping all of our families in loop.

Sincerely,

Dr. Joseph Maruszczak
Superintendent of Schools

March 11, 2020

To All in the MURSD Community-

Today MURSD Nursing coordinator Leslie McInnis and I had the opportunity to meet with representatives of the Mendon & Upton Boards of Health to further coordinate the Regional School District's policies and practices in light of the expanding Coronavirus (COVID-19) epidemic. As the Boards of Health contain the appropriate expertise, the MURSD is in constant and close communication with them for the latest guidance.

First, I would like to reiterate the precautionary measures that are paramount in combatting the spread of this virus. Frequent hand washing with soap and water (20 seconds or more) remains the best measure. The custodians in our four schools will continue to be vigilant about frequent sanitizing of "high touch" areas throughout the schools, including doorknobs, railings, switches, handrails, tables, and desks. They typically spend more time disinfecting these areas during the cold and flu season and will continue to be fastidious in their cleaning. Additional precautions that may be taken may be found at [this link on the CDC website](#). And as always, if your child is sick, please do not send him/her to school.

Second, Governor Charlie Baker declared a State of Emergency in the Commonwealth yesterday, citing the escalation of presumptive cases across the state. The Massachusetts Department of Public Health (MDPH) is recommending the practice of "social distance," i.e., the avoidance of mass events where many people will be gathered in close proximity. Additionally, there should be an effort to limit travel. Hence,

the guidance has been put forward to eliminate all out of state field trips until further notice. The MURSD will be adhering to this guidance. Additionally, we will be following the recommendation to eliminate events where there is planned crowd of 250 people or more. Thus, until further notice, events such as the vertical Miscoe/Nipmuc Chorus & Band Concerts this evening and next week will be cancelled. We need to have a high degree of sensitivity about the number of students and residents (particularly the elderly) that may be present at such events.

Should there be any need to close the schools due to an outbreak in our towns or even a small number of presumptive cases, we will be following the guidance of our Boards of Health. I will continue to communicate with you the latest guidance that the MURSD receives.

I am certain that for some, this epidemic provokes a great deal of anxiety. However, please remember that at present time, in the 74 communities that comprise Worcester County, there is a grand total of one presumptive case. The DPH and health professionals consistently remind us that the current strain of flu is far more prevalent than the novel COVID-19 virus. However, we will remain vigilant in the MURSD to comply with local and state guidance to keep our students and staff safe during this crisis.

I will be in touch shortly with additional information; as conditions change so do recommendations.

Sincerely,

Dr. Joseph Maruszczak
Superintendent of Schools