

Cape Schools Open Minds and Open Doors

Community • Academics • Passion • Ethics

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Dear Parents, Students, and Community Members,

Today is day three of the closure of our school buildings due to COVID-19. On Monday some staff came in to get materials and some parents stopped in to get devices and instruments. Teachers and administrators have been busy setting up home offices, testing connectivity in order to communicate with students and with each other, and checking in with each other in an effort to provide support during this difficult time.

Yesterday Matt Sturgis, Town Manager, closed Town Hall through Sunday, March 29, 2020, so all Cape Elizabeth School Department Central Office staff are working from home. You can contact us via email if you have questions. Some school administrators will be in their school offices from time to time, otherwise they will also be working from home, contacting staff and students and assuming as many of their duties as possible. Please email them if you have specific school questions.

This is budget development time in every school district in Maine, and the call for social distancing provides a challenge in this work. On Tuesday administrators (less than 10) spread out in the media center at CEHS to make some very difficult recommendations regarding their budget requests. These recommendations will be presented to the Board and the public at a video conference budget meeting on March 24, 2020. More information about connecting to this meeting will be forthcoming and available on the district website. As usual, there will be two times for public comment at this meeting.

While teachers and educational technicians have been busy at home trying to make contact with their students, our custodians and bus drivers have been busy deep cleaning our buildings and buses. Our original intention was to allow staff into the buildings to work, if necessary. However, the traffic in and out of our buildings does not allow our custodians to do the cleaning that they need to do, and puts them at unnecessary risk. As a result of this, (if your building has not already closed down), we will allow staff and parents one more day (Thursday, March 19th at 3 PM) to collect materials, etc., and the building will remain closed until Sunday, March 29th. This may be subject to change.

In the midst of all the frenzy, there have been some rays of sunshine. Our staff and community have stepped up to the plate and taken on many challenges with courage, calm, and sometimes even a sense of humor. Teachers are continually coming up with new ideas for support and instruction and people are going out of their way to be supportive to their colleagues. Food service has collected names of families in need and will deliver food to those families. People have donated to our backpack program in order to support our food challenged families. Community members have volunteered to deliver food to families in need. The Cape Elizabeth community is really pulling together to help each other in these challenging times

Many parents are working with their students at home, and others are dealing with childcare challenges. Many of our teachers have their children at home and they are trying to figure out how to balance working, supporting their students in their studies, and parenting. The people in our community, our state, and our country are working as hard as they can to deal with the many challenges that COVID-19 is

presenting. While we are all tired, please try to be extra understanding and extra caring in these hard times. I understand your frustrations and fears. I am worrying about a grandson with cystic fibrosis, find myself not being able to be with any of my family, and have parents who, for the first time in over 70 years can't see each other every day because they are in different facilities. Believe me, I do understand.

We are continually reminded about the importance of social distancing at this time. This is not a time for playdates and sleepovers. We need to keep our families home in order to limit the spread. Please read these two resources for better understanding of the need for social distancing at this time.

As I write this communication, I just received a photo of a large group of our high school students playing together today on the school fields, and a plea from this community member to practice social distancing. I echo that plea.

I will continue to post updates. Be well, and please practice social distancing.

Donna Wolfrom

Dr. Asaf Bitton's article from March 14, "[Social Distancing: This is Not a Snow Day.](#)"

Reposted - please share: Letter from MDs in Brookline to the school community:

“As there is so much confusion, misinformation and denial on social media about the coronavirus we hope to explain, in plain language, why the experts see this as such an emergency. Many people are reading the claim online that this virus is a lot like the viruses that cause colds, and that if you get it, it will probably just seem like a bad cold and you are very unlikely to die. Depending on who you are, this may be true, but there is more to this story that is key to our outcome as a community.

This is a coronavirus that is new to the human population. Although it is related to the viruses that cause colds, and acts a lot like them in many ways, nobody has ever been exposed to this before, which means nobody has any immunity to it.

The virus is now moving explosively through the human population, spreading through respiratory secretions and 10 times more contagious than the flu or cold. Although many people will recover, about 20% will wind up with a serious pneumonia that will require hospitalization. Some will be so ill from the pneumonia that they will die. We estimate this may be 2-3%, but it is higher in Italy's experience, partially because the healthcare system was overwhelmed so rapidly. In those over age 70, the death rate is 8-20%. So, if a child catches it on a playdate, they can easily transmit it to their

grandmother as easily as touching the same doorknob or countertop.

Scientists measure the spread of an epidemic by a number called R_0 , or “R naught.” That number is calculated this way: for every person who develops the illness, how many other people do they give it to before they are cured (or dead) and no longer infectious? The R_0 for coronavirus appears to be a number close to 3 – an extremely frightening number for such a deadly disease.

Suppose you catch the virus. You will give it to 3 other people, and they will each give it to three others, and so forth. Here is how the math works, where you, the “index case,” are the first line:

1
3
9
27
81
243
729
2,187
6,561
19,683
59,046
177,147
531,441
1,594,323
4,782,969
14,348,907

So, in just 15 steps of transmission, the virus has gone from just one index case to 14.3 million other people. Those 15 steps might take only a few weeks. With school out and lots of playdates, maybe less. The first person may be young and healthy Brookline child, but many of those 14 million people will be old and sick, and they will likely die because they got a virus that started in one person's throat.

R_0 is not fixed – it can be lowered by control measures. If we can get the number below 1, the epidemic will die out. This is the point of the quarantines and social distancing, but we are not doing it fast enough.

In the US, we have to slow down the virus. American hospitals, Boston hospitals, have limited resources. We have a fixed number of ventilators and an impending calamity on our hands. Our

Italian critical care colleagues have shared with us that they simply do not have enough resources (ventilators, physicians and nurse, critical care beds), and are forced to choose who lives and dies based on old tenets of wartime triage. Older patients do not even get a ventilator and die of their pneumonia. These are decisions nobody should have to face, and we are only 11 days behind Italy's fate. Their hospitals are quite advanced, and we are no better in Boston. As doctors, we are desperately trying to prepare for the onslaught of patients in the coming weeks. It is already beginning. This is an opportunity for you as the district leadership the time to be aggressive and help us fight this by "Flattening the Curve".

We implore you, as a group of Boston's doctors preparing to fight this, to help us. Please send a new email to ALL the Brookline school district families. Social distancing is painful. We know that kids have cabin fever, they are pleading to see their friends, they may have birthday parties coming up or special events they have been looking forward to. All of us need to work and childcare is a big worry. But we need to overcome these issues and boredom for the coming weeks so that we can survive this with as few deaths as possible. What does that mean?

- 1) No playdates, not even 1:1.
- 2) No small gatherings, no meetings between a couple families, even for birthday parties.
- 3) Avoid trampoline parks, climbing gyms, restaurants, movie theaters, anything in an enclosed area. Many of these places are advertising increased cleaning and hygiene. This is not sufficient! Do not go.
- 4) Cancel planned vacations for the next month. Avoid airline travel that is not an emergency. Many airlines and rental agencies are offering penalty free cancellations.
- 5) Stay at home as much as possible. Work from home if you possibly can. You may have to go buy groceries and medicine, of course, but make the trips quick and purposeful.
- 6) Wash your hands thoroughly after you have been in public places, for a full 20 seconds, soaping up thoroughly and being sure to get between the fingers.
- 7) Please avoid disseminating social media claims that the situation is not serious or is being exaggerated. This is a national crisis and conveying

misinformation to your friends and family may put their lives in danger.

Thank you for taking the time to read this and stay safe and healthy in the coming weeks.”

Respectfully,

Erika Rangel, MD, Director of Surgical Critical Care, Brigham and Women’s Faulkner Hospital

Shawn Rangel, MD, Pediatric Surgery, Children’s Hospital Boston

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