

Dear Longhorn Community,

Today during a special board meeting, State Superintendent Joy Hofmeister proposed, and the state school board accepted the recommendation to close all public school buildings through the end of the current academic year. The board also approved the recommendation to allow local districts to design and implement some form of “continuing education” to begin as soon as possible after April 5.

This process does not allow for on-site instruction and directs educators to observe the current mandates on social distancing. While we have about 10 days to determine how we can accomplish this, we anticipate some form of distance learning.

Distance learning includes two overarching types of instruction. The type that most of our students are familiar with is synchronous instruction. This type of distance learning takes place in an environment where the instructor and learner are in real time communication. It can be through video or audio. There is direct, immediate interaction and feedback during these lessons. An example is the concurrent classes many of our high school students take. There is a video with the instructor at the front of the room or on the computer and they conduct the class much like everyone is in the same room.

The other type of distance learning is asynchronous instruction, and it does not necessarily require any type of technology. In this environment, the instruction is conducted through communication that is delayed to meet the specific needs of everyone involved. The instructor may provide content through recorded media, emails, or even snail mail.

We expect to utilize both types of distance learning; however, the asynchronous delivery will have to be the primary form as it has the greatest chance to reach all of our students. As you can expect, our implementation will vary from each of our sites; however, you can expect your child’s teacher to make direct contact in the next week. If email is not available, a phone call may be necessary. Our goal is to limit the educational loss that is inevitable during time away from the classroom, and we are committed to ensuring that no student is penalized for a lack of resources during this time.

We are hoping to alleviate much of the stress that parents must be feeling while trying to provide instruction on their own. I would encourage parents to use Khan Academy <https://www.khanacademy.org/> if available. This is a free resource that is an outstanding tool. Also, we are working on a process to provide mental health resources for all our families when needed.

We all have to accept that students across this country and at every level of education will experience some loss in skills. Our goal is to minimize loss by reinforcing current skills, and introduce new skills only where clear opportunities exist for all. Teachers will be prepared for in-depth diagnostic analysis when we return to a traditional setting. We will use that data to determine where to start and create a plan for getting back on track.

I know there is considerable anxiety concerning events like championship basketball, baseball, track, prom and graduation. We must continue to follow CDC, federal, state, and governing agency guidelines on social distancing and group events, so we’re limited on options. We continue to have discussions about these events, and we’re looking for ways to maintain these social events that are important to high school students while still being responsible for actions that might affect the health of our community.

We are all experiencing this together, so please don’t feel alone or that your child is at risk of falling behind his or her peers. It will not be easy, but I know what we’re made of. None of us will back away from the work or time that it will take to repair what might be damaged, so until we can Turn Those Horns Loose again, we’ll make this work.

It’s always A Great Day to be a LONGHORN!!

Carl Johnson, Ph.D.
Superintendent
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