



March 15, 2020

Dear Haverhill Community;

After managing what the Department of Public Health has identified as a low-risk environment in our community, **we have decided to close all Haverhill schools for at least two (2) weeks, Monday, March 16th through Friday, March 27th.** This closure includes all school-related activities and events, sports practices, and try-outs.

We appreciate your patience as we manage this rapidly changing situation. Friday, after a conference call with the State and in speaking with Superintendents from the Merrimack Valley and North Shore, it became important to us to dismiss our students over the next two weeks to work towards leveling off the potential spread of the virus to and within our community. Please note, we do not have any students or staff that have been diagnosed or presumed positive for the COVID 19 virus.

The reason for this information about school closures is due to:

- the heightened regional risk of cross-contamination from outside the community
- individuals in self-quarantine (not diagnosed) in the community
- the larger Merrimack Valley community collaborating to develop strategies for combating the further spread of this virus.

This action, as part of a city-wide and regional strategy will be most effective with the help and cooperation of the community. We have been working collectively with other towns and regions to develop a comprehensive strategy to keep our community and surrounding communities safe. A status update will be distributed to families on Monday, March 23, 2020.

As the news regarding Coronavirus continues to monopolize our conversations, we are seeing an uptick in the anxiety of our students. Below are some resources regarding how to talk with students regarding the coronavirus:

How to Talk to Children about the Coronavirus:

<https://www.health.harvard.edu/blog/how-to-talk-to-children-about-the-coronavirus-2020030719111>

Talking to Teen/Tweens about Coronavirus:

<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/02/well/family/coronavirus-teenagers-anxiety.html>

**Here is a pamphlet from the article: https://www.hemot.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Pamphlet_HEMOT_english.pdf

A Comic created from NPR based on interviews with experts:

<https://www.npr.org/sections/goatsandsoda/2020/02/28/809580453/just-for-kids-a-comic-exploring-the-new-coronavirus>

The NASP released a resource for parents:

[https://www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/resources-and-podcasts/school-climate-safety-and-crisis/health-crisis-resources/talking-to-children-about-covid-19-\(coronavirus\)-a-parent-resource](https://www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/resources-and-podcasts/school-climate-safety-and-crisis/health-crisis-resources/talking-to-children-about-covid-19-(coronavirus)-a-parent-resource)

Please know that we have provided guidance below for residents, families and students, and staff to help in practicing social isolating, monitoring symptoms, and avoiding typical student events and large gatherings during this two-week period. The intent is to isolate and therein calm the spread of the virus. If you do not assist us in this manner, we may be staying out of school for no effective result. This is a public health strategy to reduce community illness, and please take our requests seriously.

Food Support for Students: We have worked with food services to support students experiencing food scarcity and food insecurity with access to food stations (during this closure) that will comply with social isolation expectations and still allow students to have access to free school breakfast and lunch. We are committed to providing access to the nutrition our students need during this extended emergency districtwide closure. We will be offering meals for pick up at four (4) sites. We will run them daily from 11:00 a.m. – 1:00 p.m. beginning Monday, March 16. The locations are:

- A.B. Consentino School – 685 Washington Street
- Dr. Paul Nettle Middle School – 150 Boardman Street
- The Haverhill YMCA – 81 Winter Street
- The Boys and Girls Club of Greater Haverhill – 55 Emerson Street

All children of Haverhill (age 1 – graduation) – regardless of the school attended (Haverhill Public Schools, Hillview Montessori, Whittier Vocational Technical, Sacred Heart, etc.) will be served. Each child will be provided a grab-and-go breakfast and a lunch. For the most up to date information, visit the district website, www.haverhill-ps.org.

In addition, Comcast is taking immediate steps to help connect more low-income families to the Internet at home. Effective Monday, March 16, 2020, new Internet Essentials customers will receive two (2) free months of internet service. After your first two free months expire, you can either cancel the service (which you can do at any time through Comcast) or keep it as a regular paying Internet Essentials customer. You will receive an easy to use self-install-kit that includes a cable modem (to receive service at your home) with a WiFi router (to connect your devices without wires). There is no term contract or credit check and no shipping fee for equipment. <https://www.internetessentials.com/covid19>

Enrichment During Closure: The following experiences are designed to add structure to our student's day. They are not mandatory and are not considered instruction. These and other educational programs are accessible via our website using your child's HPS username and password. Contact your school if you cannot locate your child's logon information.

- Link to resources to assist with home learning: <http://www.haverhill-ps.org/supportive-home-learning-resources/>
- Access is available to all staff and students for Google Classroom, Google Meet, STAR Freckle, and MyOn, an on-line library of 6,000 books. Most district sites can be accessed from our Launchpad here: <https://home.haverhill-ps.org/>
- Our elementary and middle school staff are collaborating to assemble learning opportunities for students during the time schools are closed. Specific information regarding this will be forthcoming from your child's teacher and/or principal in the coming days.
- Haverhill High is creating targeted enrichment work to enhance the work students are doing in their course of study.

- HC Media is dedicating access to the Haverhill Public Schools on the cable education channel 99. HC Media will be showing content-specific videos for K-5 that are aligned to our State standards. We expect that this access will be ready by Tuesday, March 17th. Our Curriculum Supervisors are working on a schedule by content area.
- We intend to have two city-wide challenges. One is a reading challenge. The other is an opportunity to journal allowing students grade K -12 to write about (in words or pictures) their experiences and feelings during this unprecedented time. It is likely that students will one-day share these journals with their own children and grandchildren.

These engaging options for our students are meant to help bridge the two-week gap and to help make for a smoother return to the classroom. Stay tuned for more details to follow.

School Facility Use: As stated at our March 12, 2020, School Committee meeting, all rental use of all school facilities, public-at-large use of the facilities, and evening and community events in our facilities have been canceled, effective immediately and until further notice.

Community Health & Prevention: When a new illness is circulating, it's natural for people to ask what they can do to protect themselves and their families. For our community health actions to be effective, we need all community members to do their part by staying at home as much as possible during the school closure. Our best prevention guidance is:

- Practice social isolation—only leaving home as necessary.
- Avoid large social gatherings.
- Cover coughs/sneezes with tissues, or cough/sneeze into the inner elbow.
- Practice proper handwashing with soap and water, as often as possible. Use warm water, with soap, scrub for 20 seconds, rinse and dry.
- Use alcohol-based hand sanitizers ONLY if soap and water are not available.

What We Know About COVID-19: The novel coronavirus (COVID-19) is a strain that is part of a large family of coronaviruses that usually cause mild respiratory illnesses, such as the 'common cold'. COVID-19 is a disease caused by a new coronavirus that was not previously identified in humans before December 2019.

Quarantine and Isolation: Patients with COVID-19 have had mild to severe respiratory illness with symptoms of fever, cough, and shortness of breath. *It can take between 2 to 14 days after a person gets the virus in their body to become (outwardly) ill.*

If you think you have been exposed to COVID-19, and develop a fever and symptoms of respiratory illness, such as cough or difficulty breathing, call your healthcare provider immediately. Your healthcare provider can assess whether a test for COVID-19 is required. Depending on your contact and/or travel history, you will be asked to stay home for 14 days from the time you had contact with a positive or presumptive positive person.

During the isolation period, you should not have visitors in the location where you are isolating. If you must share living quarters with another person, then that person will be subject to quarantine as well. As noted above, we are asking students not to congregate and to remain as isolated as possible within their families as they can so assist in slowing the virus spread.

- Plan for Parents/Guardians that need to pick up daily medication: *We recognize that some families may need to pick up their child's daily medications to assure consistency in dosing. There will be a school nurse available at your child's school from 10:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.*

on Monday and Tuesday if you would like to come in and pick up the daily medication. Many of you have already communicated with your school nurse and made a plan.

We will plan to give you the remainder of this medication, in the event, the dismissal is longer than the two weeks (reminder that we only keep up to 30 days on hand). Please understand that we can only return the medication to a parent/guardian or trusted adult, and will not be handing off medications to children. We ask that you leave "as needed medications" such as Epi-pens, inhalers, etc., for now, if you do not need them currently, so we are sure to have them on hand when school reopens.

If you have any questions, please reach out to your school nurse, or Katie Vozeolas, Director of Health and Nursing Services (kvozeolas@haverhill-ps.org).

Follow-up and Next Steps: This is an unprecedented public health situation that is rapidly changing. We hope that if we all work together, we can reduce the spread of this virus, protect our most vulnerable residents, and resume normal activities shortly.

I thank you all in advance for your patience and cooperation. I thank our community partners for their support in these unprecedented times.

A status update regarding school closures will be distributed to families on Monday, March 23, 2020.

Best,

Margaret

Margaret Marotta EdD
Superintendent of Schools