

Beatrice Public School Families:

Beatrice School District continues to collaborate extensively with public health officials and other area school districts as it makes plans for how to keep students and staff safe in the evolving Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. We are in regular communication with the Nebraska Commissioner of Education and receive regular updates and guidance from the office of Governor Ricketts/Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS). This includes guidance on school closure decisions. This weekend we have participated in extensive conversations with these health professionals and have also received guidance from medical professionals at UNMC. We have processed this information internally with our administrative staff and have collaborated with other area school districts to share knowledge, expertise, and brainstorm together on how to best proceed given the variables as we know them now.

The intensity of the constantly evolving circumstances are a major consideration in our decision-making process for the coming week. Here's what we know at this point, and what actions we plan to take in the coming days and how we arrived at those decisions.

To date, school closure has NOT been recommended or encouraged for Beatrice by the Lincoln Lancaster County Health Department ([LLCHD](#)), Governor Ricketts ([DHHS Guidance](#)), the Nebraska Department of Education ([NDE](#)), within the Centers for Disease Control ([CDC Guidance](#)) School Closure protocol or the other medical professionals we have directly collaborated with on this matter. In fact, it has been suggested in some of those conversations that if schools cancel prematurely, even if well intended, it may have unintended consequences for the overall public health response in our region.

We also recognize the legitimate concern that exists within our community for a potential outbreak. We share these concerns as a school district. These feelings were exacerbated by the flurry of closures and postponements that occurred last week at home and abroad. This is a serious situation and one that requires thoughtful planning, decision-making and clear communication. We are working diligently to do all three as a school district.

We have also learned from Governor Ricketts recently that an extended school closure of up to 6-8 weeks at some point this semester is highly probable. Consequently, we have received guidance from the Nebraska Department of Education to consider how to provide meaningful enrichment for our students to curb learning loss once extended school closure occurs. At the time this guidance was shared, Beatrice had already been making plans to support student enrichment and continuity of learning during an extended school closure. That said, planning for a period of 6-8 weeks is much different than 2-3 weeks. This requires significant coordination, collaboration and support with administrators and staff. We also recently learned that if Governor Ricketts declares a regional or statewide school closure, it may prohibit the ability for staff to meet on campus to plan and collaborate to develop and put these plans in place.

Consequently, we are balancing the many variables involved in deciding that our plan for Beatrice in the coming week (as of today) is that **school will be closed for students on Monday, March 16, 2020 and Tuesday, March 17, 2020**. Certified staff will report to continue preparations to provide school enrichment for an anticipated future extended school closure, custodians and other specified support staff will expand deep cleaning practices, and food service, nurses, and other support staff will prepare to procedurally implement some of the additional proactive health and safety measures we will be taking (outlined below) when **school resumes with students on Wednesday, March 18, 2020**. Please note that this is our plan for now. We will continue to monitor the situation closely and collaborate with public health officials and statewide leaders on this matter. **Should their recommendation change, or we feel that further school closure for Beatrice is necessary, we will take those steps and communicate them with you at that time.**

The decision to close school on Monday and Tuesday is not one we took lightly. It does, however, provide additional time for us to monitor the quickly evolving dynamic we observed last week prior to having students return. It is a decision you will see many area school districts making in order to prepare for a quickly approaching future reality that may involve extended school closure. In this event, we want to be prepared to provide meaningful enrichment and continuity of learning activities for students and families at home. When students and staff are in attendance, we want to be prepared to implement a full battery of rigorous preventative health and wellness strategies.

As Governor Ricketts mentioned in a recent press conference, public health and planning related to the Coronavirus will not be a short-term issue. It will likely be a concern in our lives for 9-12 months. We need to be prepared for this potential length of time to support students and staff when face-to-face school is not in session (extended school closure) and have rigorous procedures for cleaning, hygiene monitoring, and service delivery when it is. We are trying to balance both realities with our planned next steps knowing that both will be necessary moving forward.

To that end, below you will find action steps we are asking families to take moving forward when school is in session. Subsequently, we have also outlined the additional action steps we will take to reinforce good hygiene, cleaning, and operational practices recommended by public health officials and the CDC above and beyond what has already been shared with you in our plan.

### **Action Steps for Families:**

- Continue to follow best practices recommended by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) for keeping yourself and your family healthy during cold and flu season. Please visit the following (<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/about/index.html>) to review these best practices.
- **Please keep your child home if they are sick.** Especially if the student has a fever over 100 degrees fahrenheit. We plan to send students and staff who have a fever and/or respiratory infection symptoms home immediately if they come to school.
- During times when school is in session, if anyone in your household has been recommended for a quarantine, we would ask that you or your child not come to school for the duration of that quarantine. If we know that someone in your household has been quarantined, we would exclude anyone from your home from coming to school and do our best to provide continuity of education for them while at home.
- If you or your student have traveled recently, please check the CDC website (<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/travelers/index.html>) for guidance. Not everyone that flies on a plane, cruises on a cruise ship or visits a state where there are coronavirus cases is at an elevated risk, but the website does provide clear and useful guidance to help you make wise public health decisions for yourself and others. Regardless, it is recommended to self-monitor for symptoms and fever for 14 days after you return. If you have a fever or other symptoms, immediately self-isolate by staying home and contacting the Lincoln-Lancaster County Health Department at 402-441-8006.
- If you have personal questions about COVID-19 and possible exposure, please contact the local Health Department at 402-441-8006.

### **Additional Actions by the School Above and Beyond Those Previously Communicated:**

- **Bus Cleaning:** We are working with MidStates and will begin taking additional steps to clean our buses. In the short-term this will include hand cleaning and as early as next week will involve the use of an [electrostatic sanitizing gun](#). This is an efficient and highly effective way to reduce the spread of germs on school buses.
- **Food Service:** Our Food Service program, managed by Dawn, plans to remove all self-service options. This includes removing all utensils for customers to serve themselves (e.g., fruits, vegetables, salad bars, and pizza stations). Alternative methods of offering these items without the use of shared utensils will be made available. They will also utilize

disposable eating utensils and provide trays to students during serving rather than make them available to take while in the serving line.

- **School Activities and Events:** We are awaiting further guidance from the Nebraska School Activities Association (NSAA) and are also actively planning with member schools of the River Cities Conference (RCC). As of right now, we plan to continue with practice activities involving athletes, coaches, participants and sponsors. We are exploring ways to work within the guidance for social distancing and limiting spectators so that we can limit the size of events and activities. School activity and event cancellation for a period of time is a strong possibility moving forward.

- **Campus Visitors:** We plan to restrict external campus visitors at this time until further notice. Parents may still visit our main office, but in-classroom non-staff volunteers, TeamMate mentors, and other guests will not be allowed in our schools beyond the main office unless deemed necessary by school administration. We understand the important relationship our mentors have with their mentees and we will begin exploring ways to use technology to allow them to continue to interact.

- **Out of State Student Travel:** All out of state student travel planned for spring(March-April) will be cancelled until further notice. In most instances, the events, competitions, and activities our students would have been traveling to have been canceled or will likely be cancelled very soon. This is a practical step that reflects our current reality.

- **Student Attendance Procedures:** Regular school attendance is an important contributor to high levels of student achievement. However, in light of the current circumstances, and due to the recommendations made above for families to keep their child(ren) home when they are sick with cold and flu-like symptoms or when someone in the home has been recommended for self-quarantine, we understand the need to relax some of our policies related to school truancy. School administrators will work individually with families to ensure our current policies to promote good attendance and curb student truancy are applied thoughtfully and practically so that students and families stay home in the recommended instances.

- **Use of School Facilities by External Groups:** Effective Monday, March 15, 2020, the use of Beatrice campus facilities by outside groups, teams and patrons will be closed until further notice.

- **Wi Fi Connectivity:** We have surveyed students in grades 6-12 to determine WiFi connectivity and will be working with Windstream and Charter toward a connectability solution for those that need it. We know some families may not have access to technology (e.g., Chromebook, laptop, desktop, or iPad) and that some aspects of that plan may require access to a device. If you do NOT have access to a device at home, please complete the information in the following [survey](#). We ask that if you do have access to a

device at home that you not request an additional device from the school unless it is necessary because of your circumstances. For any family that requests (a) device(s) by completing the survey, we will communicate with you regarding how to obtain it if we move to an extended school closure.

Finally, I would like to end this email with a sincere thank you to all of our families. We understand that school closure creates inconveniences for our families. We also understand that many of you are worried about what the future holds with this pandemic and what that means for the health and well-being of your family. We greatly appreciate your patience, flexibility and trust you put in our schools. We continue to focus on making decisions that we believe are in the best interest of student health, well-being and learning. We also pledge to be diligent in our continued communication, proactive monitoring of the situation, and thoughtful action plans as this unfolds. Our circumstances and next steps may change quickly so we would encourage you to continue monitoring our communication.

Sincerely

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Jason Alexander  
Superintendent  
Beatrice Public Schools