

From Needham Schools Superintendent Gutekanst:

Thursday, March 12, 2020

Dear Needham Public Schools Families:

After consulting with school staff, local officials, and our Town of Needham Public Health partners over the evolving situation associated with the spread of the Coronavirus (COVID-19), I have decided that **the Needham Public Schools will close tomorrow, Friday, March 13th for a two-week period with classes resuming Monday, March 30th.** Of course, based on updated and new information and guidance from local, state, and Federal officials, we will evaluate the status of school reopening at that time.

While we are not aware of any instance of a Needham Public Schools student, staff member, or family member impacted by COVID-19, we believe it is a prudent step to close school for this time period. I recognize that this decision has far-reaching impacts on our families, caregivers, and the broader community, and I understand the uncertainty and frustration that results. Making a decision like this is complicated by the fact that there are children and families in our community who depend on the educational, social/emotional, and nutritional supports that our schools, teachers, and staff provide. I am especially concerned about this vulnerable population and hope over the coming weeks we can work with community partners to assist as much as possible.

Evidence shows that social distancing is one of the most effective ways to combat the spread of infectious diseases like this one. Social distancing occurs when people stay away from crowds and large gatherings, and when they maintain a person-to-person distance of at least six feet.

Therefore I am asking parents, families, and students to practice social distancing while school operations are temporarily suspended. It is strongly recommended that parents, families, and students limit all non-essential travel and gatherings in commercial or social settings.

During the week of March 16th, teachers and staff will use the remaining *snow days* to prepare and plan so that beginning on Monday, March 23rd, we will have learning experiences and opportunities teachers will be able to share with their students, much of it online. We will require the cooperation and good spirit of students and the adults who care for them to work together to make these learning opportunities at home worthwhile. And yet we acknowledge the experience will be novel and imperfect. We will also support those students who may lack digital resources at home.

Families and students can expect additional information, updates, and guidance over the course of the next several days from my office and your principal.

Suddenly and unexpectedly, we find ourselves as a community and as a nation confronting a pandemic and trying to make decisions and plans that prioritize the safety and wellbeing of our loved ones. All of us - teachers, parents, students, caregivers - we are all in this together, and I am confident if we support one another and stay strong as one Needham community we will get through this.

I appreciate your patience, guidance, and anticipated good spirit now and in the days ahead.

Respectfully,

Dan Gutekanst  
Superintendent  
Needham Public Schools