

## **Dear Mercer Island School District Community,**

Thank you for your continued support as we respond to the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) risk.

We are actively monitoring the information available about COVID-19. Public Health - Seattle and King County, Washington State Department of Health (DOH) and Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) continue to provide us with the most up-to-date information. **There have been no confirmed cases of COVID-19 on Mercer Island.** However, we are aware that out of an abundance of caution some residents are self-quarantining based on suspected exposure to the virus.

King County Public health authorities have issued the following new guidance aimed at reducing the risk of exposure to COVID-19:

*If you can feasibly avoid bringing large groups of people together, consider postponing events and gatherings.*

See [King County Public Health News Blog](#), March 4, 2019.

**Though the above is only guidance, not a requirement, the District is nonetheless cancelling all off-Island school field trips and after-school, evening and weekend activities. This cancellation excludes before and after school care (e.g. KidsCo.) as well as athletic practices (e.g. soccer, lacrosse, track, etc.).**

**The District's cancellation of such events begins tonight, Wednesday, March 4.**

King County Public Health is **not** recommending that schools close unless there is a confirmed case of COVID-19. The reasons for this recommendation include that, so far, children have not been shown to be a

high-risk group and in the past, specifically during the 2009/10 H1N1 outbreak, school closures did not have a significant impact on reducing the spread of that virus.

This is a rapidly evolving situation. We will update the community should the situation change.

Be assured that we are:

- Staying up to date with current, accurate information from the state and county DOH;
- Sharing good hygiene practices and practicing routine cleaning and disinfecting procedures of commonly touched surfaces;
- Maintaining an open line of communication with Public Health - Seattle and King County;
- Communicating regularly with students, families, staff and our community;
- Intentionally and persistently combating stigma surrounding COVID-19; and
- Actively engaged in contingency planning for the possibility of extended school closures.

On Tuesday, March 3, OSPI provided an updated bulletin ([See OSPI Bulletin 14-20](#)) with guidance for school districts regarding student attendance; waivers (if necessary) for missed days and instructional hours due to closures; and distance learning.

### **Student Attendance**

We understand that, out of a concern for their student's safety, some families may choose to keep their children home even if not ill. If a student misses school for this reason, the student's absence may be considered excused. Similarly, if a student self-quarantines or is quarantined on the

advice from medical professionals, such absences will also be excused. If a student self-quarantines or is quarantined on the advice of medical professionals, the student's family should immediately contact the school. As with any illness-related absence, we will work with each individual student and family in support of the student's learning.

### **Cleaning the schools and facilities**

The District continues to diligently clean and sanitize our schools, buses and other buildings. District nurses and lead custodians will continue to collaborate on ways to keep our schools and building sites safe. The District will remind students, staff, and visitors to use universal precautions such as hand washing, coughing into a tissue or elbow and avoiding touching eyes, nose, and mouth. Please help us by reinforcing the use of universal precautions at home with your child.

With staff support, we continue to utilize the Health Department recommended sanitizing products in all of our classrooms, communal spaces and buses.

The District has developed an extended schedule to clean and sanitize our schools over the weekends to reduce disruptions during the day.

### **How will the District provide notification if a school closure occurs?**

MISD will use our usual emergency notification system for any school closure, including FlashAlert, email, text, our website, and social media platforms. Remember that we work in coordination with King County Public Health and can only release medical information that complies with privacy laws.

### **Will the Mercer Island School District offer alternative learning (online) if schools are closed?**

Again, the District wants to emphasize that at this point the public health authorities are NOT recommending closing schools at this time. If there is a confirmed case of COVID-19, Public Health will work with the school and the District to determine the best measures including potential closure of the school.

In the event the District is advised to temporarily close one or more school sites, the District will seek to make up any missed days through the use of inclement weather/emergency make-up days and pursuing the waiver process, as available. [See OSPI Bulletin 14-20](#).

MISD, along with school districts across the Puget Sound region, are exploring many options for offering educational opportunities in non-traditional settings should one or more schools be closed for an extended period. Online connectivity and access is just one of many considerations when thinking about the whole child. We have students with a broad range of learning needs for whom we offer a myriad of services and supports each day. Simply moving to an online learning platform does not guarantee that we can continue to offer equitable access to all students as part of a free and appropriate public education.

While we may not be able to supplant one of our 180 school days with online classes, the District is continuing to prepare for ways we can supplement learning for our students and support families at home during extended school closure. Our Instructional Technology Coaches and other educators are already working on this.

### **Where can families find accurate information about COVID-19?**

- Our website, at [mercerislandschools.org/coronavirus](https://mercerislandschools.org/coronavirus), is updated regularly with information regarding COVID-19;

- [Washington State Health Department coronavirus page](#) (中文 , [Русский](#), [Tiếng Việt](#), [한국어](#) ) ;
- [Public Health - Seattle and King County Coronavirus Information page](#) (新型冠状病毒, 신종 코로나바이러스, Новый штамм коронавируса);
- CDC: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html> (关于冠状病毒疾病 2019).
- National Assoc. of School Psychs: [Talking to kids about COVID-19](#)

For families in need of translation, please contact Mary Newcomer (206)230-6336 or [mary.newcomer@mercerislandschools.org](mailto:mary.newcomer@mercerislandschools.org)

**Sincerely,  
Donna Colosky  
Superintendent**