

March 12, 2020

Dear Students, Parents, Staff, and Community Members:

In the interest of public health, the safety and well-being of students, staff, and the communities we serve, the superintendents of public, Christian, and Catholic schools within Kent ISD have canceled all student field trips, school-related travel, assemblies, and events involving more than 100 community participants, effective immediately until further notice.

Please understand we do not make these decisions lightly. We recognize extracurricular activities and events are a rich part of the school experience for students and their families.

This decision is consistent with the recommendations of the Kent County Health Department and the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services. These recommendations also reflect the precautions suggested by Gov. Gretchen Whitmer, who this week declared a [state of emergency](#) to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in our state.

These are the most appropriate actions to be taken at this time. The Kent County Health Department assures us, and the community, that our schools are the safest place for students to be. Data collected worldwide indicates healthy children are the least likely demographic group to contract or spread COVID-19. That said, students who are ill should stay at home. All schools are temporarily suspending attendance awards and incentives.

Our immediate plan for mitigating the spread of COVID-19 in our communities while advancing student learning is based on three factors:

1. Avoiding unnecessary exposure of our staff and students to illness.
2. Working to the best of our ability to ensure the continuity of teaching and learning in Kent County.
3. Protecting the health and well-being of our multigenerational community, especially those who are most vulnerable to illness.

With this in mind, we will enact the following measures related to events and programs scheduled outside of the regular school day beginning Thursday, March 12:

- All field trips are suspended until further notice.
- All school-sponsored travel is suspended until further notice.
- All assemblies and performances in our schools involving more than 100 participants in one room from the general public, other than students and staff, are suspended until further notice.
- All community meetings, community education programming (excluding before/after school childcare, preschool, and daycare programming), rentals, and gatherings scheduled to take place within our school facilities are suspended until further notice.
- All athletic events will continue in accordance with guidance issued by the Michigan High School Athletic Association (MHSAA) Updates will be posted at www.mhsaa.com.
- Schools will follow the guidance of the Kent County Health Department for outdoor activities not governed by the MHSAA. The Health Department reports the transmission of this disease, and most others, is far less likely outdoors than indoors.
- Any indoor after-school activity consisting of a group of less than 100 people and an extension of the normal learning day (clubs, athletic practices, etc.) will continue as planned.
- All tours of school facilities will be suspended until further notice.
- While we appreciate volunteers, we are limiting access of visitors to classrooms until further notice.

As we prepare for all possible scenarios, we are asking you to develop a plan for your family in the event schools were to close for an extended period of time. We are taking COVID-19 very seriously and hope that, with your help, we can mitigate the spread of this virus in Kent County. Please follow the recommendations to wash your hands, stay home when you are sick, and practice good hygiene.

We also ask families planning to travel during spring break to be aware of the conditions at their destinations, and in the airports they must use, to ensure they do not put their family or others at risk during their trip or upon their return. We anticipate more guidance coming from the Health Department surrounding protocols of students returning from spring break as we get closer to that date.

Schools are the safest, healthiest, and most nurturing environments for students to be. The Kent County Health Department has emphasized that, based on the science surrounding this disease, there is no benefit to closing school, and in fact could make matters worse as it could accelerate the spread of the virus to vulnerable populations (e.g., grandparents who would provide child care when school is closed, etc.). Universities that have closed have done so based on a separate set of variables, namely college dormitories. The Health Department has assured us closing is not the proper course for K-12 schools.

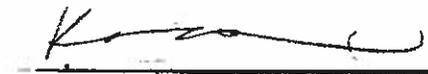
We will continue to take any/all measures to keep our children, staff, and school community safe. The situation involving this health challenge is rapidly changing and we will update you regularly as additional guidance is received. The above actions are the measures deemed appropriate **at this time** given the latest guidance from federal, state, and county experts. Thank you for your attention and support regarding this important topic as safety is our number one priority.

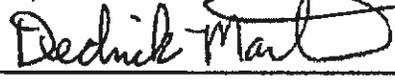
Sincerely,

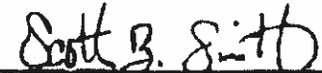
The Superintendents of the Kent ISD Public and Private Schools

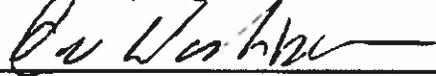
Local School District Signatures


Ronald E. Caniff
Kent Intermediate School District


Kevin Macina,
Byron Center Public Schools


Detric Martin, Ed.D.
Caledonia Community Schools


Scott Smith
Cedar Springs Public Schools


Dave Washburn
Comstock Park Public Schools

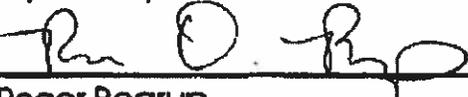

Heidi Kattula, Ed.D.
East Grand Rapids Public Schools

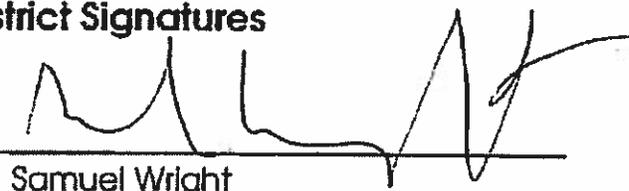

Daniel Behm
Forest Hills Public Schools

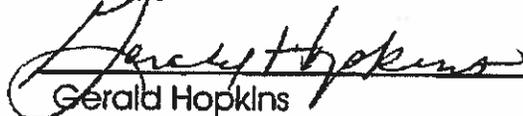

Kevin Polston
Godfrey Lee Public Schools

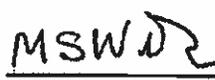

William Ferrerhoff
Godwin Heights Public Schools

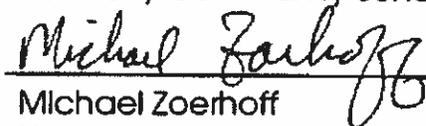

Ron Gorman, Ph.D.
Grand Rapids Public Schools

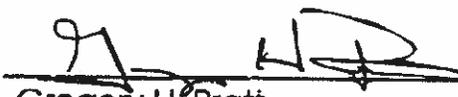

Roger Bearup
Grandville Public Schools

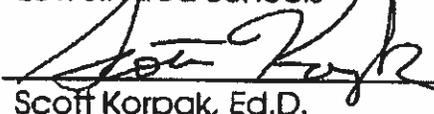

Samuel Wright
Kelloggsville Public Schools

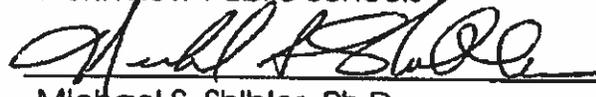

Gerald Hopkins
Kenowa Hills Public Schools

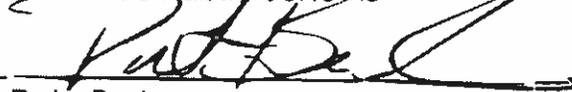

Michael Weller
Kent City Community Schools

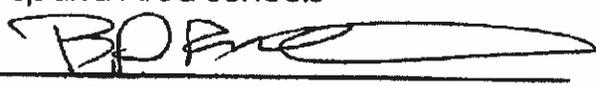

Michael Zoerhoff
Kentwood Public Schools


Gregory H. Pratt
Lowell Area Schools

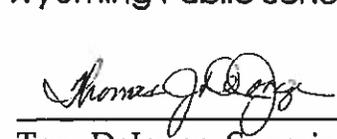

Scott Korpak, Ed.D.
Northview Public Schools


Michael S. Shible, Ph.D.
Rockford Public Schools


Pete Bush
Sparta Area Schools


Rob Blitchok
Thornapple Kellogg Schools


Craig Hoekstra
Wyoming Public Schools


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KENT COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT



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Adam London, PhD, R.S., D.A.A.S.
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HEALTH UPDATE March 10, 2020

Update for Kent County Schools on Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19)

March 11, 2020

Partner in Health:

As partners in protecting the health and safety of our children and families, below you will find a brief situational update as well as current recommendations for school administrators and decision makers based on guidance from the Kent County Health Department (KCHD). Please understand that this is a rapidly evolving situation and KCHD will continue to communicate with you as information changes.

WHAT IS KNOWN

- The virus causing coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) is a new coronavirus that has not been previously identified and causes a respiratory illness ranging from a mild cold-like illness to severe pneumonia.
- More than 80% of people diagnosed with COVID-19 in China had mild disease.
- Similar to influenza, the people who are most likely to have severe disease and complications from COVID-19 are older individuals (>60 years old) and those with other medical conditions like heart and lung disease or diabetes.
- There is no vaccine or treatment currently available for COVID-19.
- Currently, there are 2 presumptive positive COVID-19 cases in Michigan. At this time cases are in Wayne and Oakland Counties.
- Currently, there is **NO** confirmed community spread of COVID-19 in Kent County, but experts predict there will eventually be community spread.

HOW THE VIRUS SPREADS

- COVID-19 is believed to spread primarily the same way the common cold or flu spreads—through respiratory droplets that are produced when someone coughs or sneezes.
- People who are most at risk of becoming infected with COVID-19 are those who have been in close contact (within about 6 feet) with someone who has the disease.
- People are thought to be most contagious when they are most symptomatic (the sickest).
- Some spread of the virus might be possible before a person has symptoms, but this is not thought to be the main way the virus spreads.

WHAT CAN SCHOOLS DO NOW, PRIOR TO LOCAL COMMUNITY SPREAD

- Implement your annual seasonal influenza plan.
 - Students and staff who are ill, especially with fever and/or acute respiratory symptoms (not allergies or chronic conditions), should stay home.

- Review sick policies for staff; ensure staff can stay home when ill.
- Ensure prescribed cleaning is happening at school facilities (routine disinfectants are appropriate).
 - Enhance cleaning of high touch surfaces like door knobs, toilet handles, and sink handles.
 - Ensure that hand sanitizer, soap/paper towels and tissues are widely available in school facilities.
 - Remind students to cover their coughs/sneezes with a tissue or their elbow.
- Plan for when community spread occurs (non-pharmaceutical interventions or NPIs).
 - Ensure parents/guardians have a plan to designate a caregiver who is under the age of 60 for a sick child(ren) if parents/guardians can't stay home.
 - Look for opportunities to address food insecurity for families who rely on schools for breakfast and/or lunch.
 - Identify at-home learning opportunities during student absences or school closures.
 - Identify how the school will communicate updates to parents/guardians.
 - For more information about use of NPIs to respond to pandemics, visit <https://www.cdc.gov/nonpharmaceutical-interventions/>.

WHAT SHOULD SCHOOLS DO WHEN COMMUNITY SPREAD OCCURS

- Continue to ensure that soap/paper towels, hand sanitizer, and tissues are widely available in school facilities. Regular hand hygiene should be built into the daily routine.
- Consider limiting the number of people that have contact with students in the school building including parents or volunteers during the school day and gatherings that occur in the school building during non-school hours.
- Consider having students eat meals in the classroom or in smaller cohorts in the lunch room
- Avoid assemblies and multiple class activities to limit non-essential contact between students in large gatherings.
- Consider canceling or postponing events that bring groups of families and students into more frequent contact with each other.
- Have a separate room for sick children to be in while waiting for a caregiver to pick them up if they become ill during the school day.

KEY CONSIDERATIONS FOR ADMINISTRATORS BEFORE CLOSING SCHOOLS FOR COVID-19

- The Kent County Health Department would recommend the closure of schools **only** if there is an imminent public health threat created by the schools being open.
- Careful consideration for school closure recommendations will take into account the severity of disease, benefits to public health, impact on student learning, families, childcare, school staff and the economy.
- **Closing schools could potentially accelerate the transmission of COVID-19 to the most vulnerable people** (e.g. older adults and those with chronic health conditions) if individuals from these categories, such as grandparents, are used as caregivers during a school closure or if children will congregate in other settings.
- **Schools in Kent County considering closure due to COVID-19 (or other infectious diseases) should work with KCHD before closing. Please contact KCHD if you are considering closing a school.**

KCHD staff are working day and night to monitor this evolving situation and will continue to provide new information to the community as things change. If you have questions or are seeing increases in illness and would like to consult with our team, please call us (616) 632-7228 or the numbers below.

For up-to-date information, please visit our website at <https://www.accesskent.com/Health/coronavirus.htm>.

Sincerely,

Joann Hoganson, MSN, RN
Director of Community Wellness, Kent County Health Department
Liaison to schools

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