

March 4, 2020

Dear FPS Families, Faculty and Staff,

I hope this communication finds you well and enjoying the mild March weather. On February 7 and 28, your school principal sent letters to families regarding COVID-19 (also known as coronavirus). Although there are no reported cases in Connecticut, I want to reiterate key points from those letters and share some additional updates on how the district is preparing for the potential spread of COVID-19. We hope that our proactive planning highlighted below won't need to be fully implemented, but we must be prepared for this potential health issue. As always, we will make measured decisions to ensure we are taking a balanced, thoughtful and informed approach to addressing this health issue as we progress through the coming weeks and months.

Absence Tracking

Our nurses closely monitor student and staff absences in their respective schools, particularly during flu season. This helps us spot trends in certain classrooms and schools across the district so we can take immediate steps to help minimize the spread of illness. We will continue this absence monitoring process while COVID-19 remains a potential issue.

Procedures for Absences

Whenever your child is absent, please call the school and explain the reason for the absence. We appreciate any information you can provide about your child's symptoms in order to help us protect all members of our school community, especially our medically fragile students. We strive to make thoughtful decisions about how to respond if and when absence rates increase. For guidance on when to keep your children at home, please see this [link](#). Generally, students should be symptom and fever free for 24 hours without the use of fever-reducing or other symptom-reducing medications before they return to school. If you have questions about whether your child should return to school, please contact your child's physician.

School & Bus Cleaning

Whenever we experience increased student and staff absences, our custodians begin more aggressive cleaning procedures in schools and classrooms. These include cleaning door knobs, stair railings, chromebooks and other frequently touched surfaces multiple times throughout the day. Aggressive cleaning procedures, which have been occurring in our schools for the past several weeks, will continue while COVID-19 remains a potential issue. In addition, M&J Transportation has informed us that they are implementing protocols for daily cleaning of buses between runs as well as more comprehensive cleaning of buses on an ongoing basis.

Emergency Plans

The district already has plans to address the possibility of a widespread outbreak of illness. When we experienced the H1N1 virus in 2009, these plans were updated to address the unique attributes of that virus. Similarly, we are refining our plans in collaboration with the Farmington Valley Health District (FVHD) and the Connecticut Department of Public Health (DPH) as we learn more about COVID-19 and the ways in which it spreads. In addition to having met internally to update our plans going forward, Central Office staff also will meet with our town-wide Emergency Management Team in the coming days to ensure a collaborative and coherent process among organizations, agencies and residents in order to minimize the potential impact of COVID-19.

District Website and Communication

We recently developed a dedicated COVID-19 webpage on our district website that contains resources for families as well as school and district communications. You may access our new COVID-19 webpage [here](#). We intend to keep this webpage up to date over the coming weeks and months so you have the most current information available in one convenient location. Please share this website with other Farmington families.

Preventing the Spread of COVID-19

According to the FVHD, the protocols we use for the annual flu season are the same ones currently recommended to address the spread of COVID-19. These include absence monitoring, aggressive cleaning, and good hygiene habits which teachers reinforce with students (highlighted below). If necessary in the coming weeks or months, we would take additional steps during the school day to prevent a spread of the virus such as minimizing large gatherings of students for school-day and afterschool events. Please know we have hand sanitizers in classrooms and throughout all of our schools, and teachers encourage students to frequently wash their hands and utilize these sanitizers throughout the day. These good hygiene habits are essential to minimize the spread of the virus.

We plan to place posters stressing the importance of handwashing in restrooms throughout our schools and have teachers speak to students and/or show short videos about the importance of proper handwashing throughout the day. We also have guidance for teachers and staff to support students who may feel stressed or anxious about what they are viewing via news outlets related to COVID-19. If this is the case with your child(ren), please contact your school so we can support them in a timely manner. We also have included a resource below to provide guidance for families about speaking to your child(ren) about COVID-19.

Family Travel

If you are planning to travel with your family, please refer to the following link: <https://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel>. This website is regularly updated with current information. Please inform us if you are planning a family trip, including your destination. If your child or family members have any symptoms of illness upon return from a trip, please keep your child at home and contact your family physician. Upon return to school, please bring your child to the school nurse.

School-Sponsored Travel

The district is currently reviewing all planned school travel. We are currently considering the cancellation of all international and out-of-state trips as the COVID-19 situation progresses in other states and internationally. Information will be shared with families, faculty and staff as soon as any decisions are made about these trips.

Educational Continuity

We have received questions about the potential for the loss of school days. If we need to cancel school due to a wide-spread outbreak of COVID-19, that decision will be made in consultation with the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE), FVHD, DPH and other partners by analyzing data trends related to absences across the district. By state statute, students are required to attend school 180 days per year. Shortened days count toward the 180 day requirement. At this time, distance or remote learning does not count toward the 180-day requirement, and lost days would need to be made up before the end of the school year (up to June 30). If the CSDE provides a waiver of the 180-day requirement, remote learning is a potential consideration due to our investment in technology-enhanced curriculum. However, this approach would require a great deal of logistical planning as well as collaboration and extensive curricular planning with teachers and administrators to ensure *all* students have access to resources for remote learning.

Extracurricular Activities

Should COVID-19 spread significantly in our community, we may need to limit large gatherings of students and the community. This would impact extracurricular activities, especially sporting events. Any cancellation of sporting events will be done in collaboration with the Connecticut Interscholastic Athletic Conference (CIAC) and other school districts. We also will work with the Farmington Parks and Recreation Department and FPS Continuing Education if cancellations are warranted.

Partnerships & Collaboration

As you might imagine, planning for and responding to a potential health emergency like COVID-19 requires thoughtful and measured decisions to be made in many different areas. I want to assure you that we are working closely on each of these areas with our education, health and wellness, and community partners, including the FVHD, the DPH, the CSDE, the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), local physicians including our Medical Director (Barbara Ziogas, M.D.), our Director of Health Services (Sue Beardsley, R.N.), our Emergency Management Director (FPD Chief Paul Melanson), UConn Medical Center, the Town of Farmington, and other individuals and agencies. We also are in regular communication with neighboring school districts to share resources and best practices. Please know that we must all work together to prevent the spread of this illness. The more each individual follows the preventative recommendations, the more we will minimize the impact of this illness.

We have included some helpful links below for families. If you have any questions or concerns, please contact your school nurse or school administrator(s). We thank you for your attention to this communication and your continuing partnership to help us to be prepared to keep all of our students, families, faculty, staff and community members healthy.

Sincerely,
Kathleen C. Greider
Superintendent

Below are some additional resources to help your family prepare for COVID-19:

- [CDC Factsheet on COVID-19](#)
- [Parent / Caregiver Guide to Helping Families Cope with Coronavirus](#)
- [CDC FAQs: Coronavirus and Children](#)
- [CDC Guidance on Handwashing](#)
- [CDC Guidance on Helping Your Child Develop Handwashing Skills](#)
- [CDC Video on Handwashing](#)
- [If You Become Ill with COVID-19](#)