Wednesday, March 4, 2020

Dear Parents, Guardians and Community Members:

I wanted to bring to your attention the ongoing concern regarding the coronavirus. I imagine you are all reading and/or hearing about the coronavirus outbreaks across the world and now we are starting to see the first of these cases being identified in New York State.

I would like you to know that I have been briefed twice in the past four days regarding this virus, most recently while I was attending a series of meetings in Albany, held on March 3, 2020, conducted by the NYS Department of Health. You may access the exact PowerPoint presentation on their website under the title, “Update on COVID-19 for New York State Schools (Pre K-12) March 3, 2020.” Much of what is contained within this presentation you have probably already heard or may be aware of.

For your review, I would just like to highlight a few things about the coronavirus:

Currently,

1. This remains a very fluid situation. The Department of Health, the Center for Disease Control and the World Health Organization continue to learn more about this by the hour.
2. The thought right now is that this can be transmitted in much the same way as we transmit colds and the flu from person to person. Proper preventative steps should be followed – like washing your hands thoroughly and often, avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth with unwashed hands, avoid contact with sick people, stay home and away from crowds if you aren’t feeling well, cover your mouth when sneezing and coughing and clean and disinfect surfaces and objects often.
3. Many of the symptoms of this virus, like a cough and fever, are not unlike the symptoms of colds and flu. As the matter of fact, many people may have a mild case of this virus and may not even know it.
4. Many of the fatalities that have occurred are in people that possess compromised immune systems or people who were or are smokers.
5. The symptoms that children exhibit appear to be more mild than in adults, however anyone can carry and pass this virus along.

Here in the schools, please know that we will continue to stress the following as precautionary measures:
1. Communicate the importance of proper hygiene to everyone.
2. Continue to monitor our attendance.
3. Continue to clean and disinfect classrooms, common areas and our buses.
4. Monitor new findings and trends and react accordingly.
5. I will continue to be briefed regularly by The County and State Health Departments, CDC and SED.

We will also continue to be vigilant about monitoring the situation. If it becomes necessary, we will review all mass gatherings regarding events and make decisions appropriately.

Our team will be creating plans to deal with these issues with the hope that we may never need to use them. Certainly, I will be in constant communication with the Departments of Health and the State Education Department, and, as I receive new information or, as we solidify plans, I will be certain to share them with you.

I will conclude by saying that all the organizations dealing with this have urged us not to panic and to use the proper precautions. This is not unlike some of the other pandemics we have experienced, most recently, the H1N1 virus or swine flu in 2009. The difference is that this one caught us by surprise therefore it wasn’t as well researched. Please know, we have the best minds in the world studying all aspects of this virus, and they continue to learn more and more about the virus each day.

I would encourage you to visit the websites of the New York State Department of Health, the Center for Disease Control, and State Education Department for regular or ongoing updates.

Additionally, I have attached to our district website some links and videos for your preview regarding information on the virus and precautionary measures and guidelines to be aware of.

My sincere apologies for the length of this message but I feel it is important to share the information that I have been given at this point.

If the school can be of any assistance, please don’t hesitate to call.

Respectfully,

Timothy J. Gaffney
Superintendent of Schools