

BERNARDS TOWNSHIP PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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Dear Parent/Guardian:

The situation with regard to COVID-19 is one that seems to be changing by the minute. We are doing our best to work with local, county and state officials to stay informed and provide accurate information to you as parents. We know that there are many questions. On Thursday, March 5 an additional memo on the subject was issued by the Commissioner of Education, which provided more information that assisted in the creation of the below Q & A. We hope you will find it helpful.

1) Might schools be closed as a consequence of COVID-19?

Yes, this is possible. School closures are considered a Non Pharmaceutical Intervention (NPI) to help minimize the transmission of illness within the community. The decision to close school would be made by school leadership under the counsel and direction of district, state and/or local health officials. Since a decision to close schools could come with very little notice, all students and staff should be mindful to take all personal items needed home from school on a daily basis. In addition, students should take home all of their learning resources – textbooks, binders, etc. daily.

2) What happens if schools are closed?

Guidance issued on March 5 indicates that if schools are closed by a written directive from the state or a local health department, home instruction strategies may be used to provide instructional services to enrolled students. Further, “any day in which students impacted by a public health-related closure have access to home instruction services....will count as a day in which the board of education has provided public school facilities toward its compliance with the 180-day requirement...”. Depending on health circumstances, facilities may stay open for staff.

Providing home instruction to students remotely when schools are closed as a NPI presents many challenges, however our district is positioned reasonably well to do so through the use of technology. We have already begun planning for this possibility at our end. We were able to begin the process during our teacher in-service on Wednesday March 4, however given the breadth and complexity of the challenge, we are going to need more time to work with our staff. **For this reason, schools will be dismissing early again on Wednesday March 11th for an additional in-service session to prepare for this unprecedented possibility.** Please be advised that a second early dismissal for another in-service may be needed. Some courses, services and programs can be managed remotely, while others will be difficult or impossible to replicate; should a lengthy school closure come to pass, regular action updates will be provided.

In order to gauge our ability to work with each family to provide children remote instruction (aka virtual, “e” or distance learning) we need your assistance with two things. First, we need each family to complete a brief survey about technology resources at home (only ONE survey response per family is needed). To complete this survey please click [here](#). Secondly, we need to emphasize the importance of email accounts for parents and students. It is critical for parents to follow email messages being sent by the district to the email address associated with the parent portal of Genesis. Students on the other hand, should be accessing school email messages via their school Gmail account. Please make sure you and your child are able to access messages sent to you by our district. Test email messages will be sent to parent and student email accounts during the next week.

The community should keep in mind that if schools are closed, all after school activities, athletics and rentals will be canceled. We certainly hope that extreme measures, such as school closures, do not prove to be necessary and that distance learning would therefore not be needed. Furthermore, there are zero (0) confirmed cases of Novel Coronavirus

(COVID-19) in our community. However, in light of these very unusual circumstances, we want to prepare sooner rather than later.

3) What is going on with travel, school sports/activities and school field trips?

Clearly, for any days that schools were to be closed, no field trips, sports or activities would be running. Currently we are maintaining the status quo, open with regular operations; as such, *currently there are no plans to cancel any of our activities or field trips*. However, we are closely monitoring the travel restrictions provided by the CDC and considering the advice of district, state and local health officials, and *it may well be possible that field trips or other activities are canceled in the future with little notice*. Should trips be canceled, we will make every effort to recoup funds. The situation with this virus is changing rapidly, and it is very difficult to determine if things like the 8th grade trip to Washington, DC might need to be canceled. We have no district sponsored field trips planned for outside of the United States.

Many parents and staff have asked about voluntary travel outside of the United States for things such as vacations over spring break. We strongly discourage any travel outside of the United States. Any staff or students that take a trip outside of the United States must contact the school nurse *before* returning to school. Depending on the travel taken, staff or students may be instructed to self-quarantine for 14 days.

4) Given the situation whereby students are being encouraged to stay home if they are sick, is there any flexibility on the attendance policy?

Individual situations with student attendance have always been handled with care in our district. Certainly, under the circumstances, we will continue this practice with even more sensitivity, however we do ask that parents obtain and submit doctors' notes from health care providers for all office visits for their children.

5) What other resources are available?

Our district's homepage, www.bernardsboe.com is being updated with the latest information and notices we have. Please refer to the news section that is front and center on the homepage, three links will be posted for COVID-19: subpages for parents, students, and staff. In particular I would draw to your attention the document posted on the COVID-19 for Parents portion of the website called, [Talking to Children About COVID-19, A Parent Resource](#).

Here in our district we will continue to maintain our additional cleaning procedures. We are also distributing as much hand sanitizer as possible and providing our teachers with disinfecting wipes to use throughout the day. We will continue to reach out to parents with continuing information related to COVID-19 as it becomes available. In the meantime, please be reminded of the guidance and resources below, check out our homepage and monitor your email.

Sincerely,



Nick Markarian

CDC Recommendations to Help Prevent Spreading of Respiratory Disease

- Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth.
- Stay home when you are sick.
- Cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue, then throw the tissue in the trash.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces using a regular household cleaning spray or wipe.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds.