March 16, 2020

RE: Update on School Closure

Dear Parents/Guardians,

The need to close schools for an extended period of time is a new experience for all of us. As a parent of four kids, I have been reflecting on what I can do over the next few weeks. Our children thrive on structure and routines. Staff will be sending suggestions and resources to help you develop a schedule for your children. It is important to write and/or draw it out, so they know what to expect. In your daily schedule, incorporate movement, games and time outside in nature whenever possible. Please reach out to us for suggestions or ideas to support you and your children during this time.

Our children may feel upset or have other strong emotions about the coronavirus. Parents, family members, school staff, and other trusted adults can play an important role in helping children make sense of what they hear in a way that is honest, accurate, and minimizes anxiety or fear. Based on the educational materials for the Center of Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the following are some helpful principles for talking to children.

- **Make yourself available to listen and to talk.**
  - Make time to talk. Be sure children know they can come to you when they have questions.
- **Remain calm and reassuring.**
  - Remember that children will react to both what you say and how you say it. They will pick up cues from the conversations you have with them and with others.
- **Pay attention to what children see or hear on television, radio, or online.**
  - Consider reducing the amount of screen time focused on COVID-19. Too much information on one topic can lead to anxiety.
- **Provide information that is honest and accurate.**
  - Give children information that is truthful and appropriate for the age and developmental level of the child.
  - Talk to children about how some stories on COVID-19 on the Internet and social media may be based on rumors and inaccurate information.
- **Teach children everyday actions to reduce the spread of germs.**
  - Get children into a handwashing habit.
  - Teach them to wash their hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, especially after blowing their nose, coughing, or sneezing; going to the bathroom; and before eating or preparing food.

We understand that this decision by the Governor to close schools has created a number of questions, some of which we are still in the process of addressing. The Michigan Department of Education (MDE) and United States Department of Education are continually issuing guidance regarding how schools are expected to respond.
to this situation. Because we know that everyone has questions, we’ve attempted to provide responses to common questions that we have received.

**Frequently Asked Questions**

1. **Kent ISD is scheduled to be on spring break beginning on Friday, April 3, 2020, and continuing through Sunday, April 12, 2020. Will we be changing spring break?**

   **A:** At this time, there are no plans to adjust the scheduled spring break. Thus, spring break is still scheduled for Friday, April 3, 2020, through Sunday, April 12, 2020 with a return to the classroom on Monday, April 13, 2020.

2. **Does this mean that school buildings are closed and unavailable for student, staff and/or community access during the closure period?**

   **A:** All Kent ISD school buildings, including the main office, will be closed Monday, March 16, 2020 and not re-open until Monday, April 13. For the safety of our students and community, it is recommended that students remain home during this closure and maintain healthy habits.

3. **Will schools be required to make-up this time resulting in an extension of the school year?**

   **A:** The last day of the school year is currently planned for Friday, May 29, 2020, but may be subject to change. We are waiting for information and direction from the state regarding student instructional time and contact hours. Michigan’s State School Aid Act stipulates certain day and hour requirements subject to a number of exceptions for student school attendance. In the past, the Legislature and/or Department of Education have adjusted legislative requirements or granted waivers that provide additional flexibility. At the present time, we have not received information from the State regarding whether there will be any flexibility to the student attendance day and hour requirements.

4. **What will happen to students who rely on school-provided food service, including free and reduced meal eligible students?**

   **A:** Please check the website of the local school district in which you reside as many school districts have arranged meal distribution plans for which your child will be eligible.

   These are certainly unprecedented times and your cooperation is greatly appreciated. Please continue to monitor your email for updates going forward, and please take care of your family.

   Sincerely,

   Paul Dymowski

   Director of Center Programs