



March 11, 2020

Dear South Whidbey Staff, Students, Families and Community,

This morning, Governor Jay Inslee [announced new community strategies and social distancing plans](#) Wednesday at a news conference in Seattle to minimize COVID-19 exposure, particularly in counties hit hardest by the virus.

Starting today, events that take place in King, Snohomish, and Pierce counties with more than 250 people are prohibited by the state. This order applies to gatherings for social, spiritual and recreational activities. These include but are not limited to: community, civic, public, leisure, faith-based, or sporting events; parades; concerts; festivals; conventions; fundraisers and similar activities. “This is an unprecedented public health situation and we can’t wait until we’re in the middle of it to slow it down,” Inslee said. “We’ve got to get ahead of the curve. One main defense is to reduce the interaction of people in our lives.” Read the rest of the story on the [governor's Medium page](#).

I encourage you to listen to his press conference if you have not done so. This is all being done in an effort to reduce exposure to the virus. He encouraged continued social distancing, sanitizing, and hand washing. The virus is now officially a pandemic. He specifically encourages all schools to look at developing contingency plans in the event they are needed. We have been doing this work and you can find more information below. Keeping school open is our best contribution to our community. For some families, canceling school has serious implications, including the ability for a parent to work, access to special needs care or access to food through school meals. Closing our schools potentially impacts healthcare. Many parents are healthcare workers and first responders who are greatly needed in their jobs at this time.

It was also stated that the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) is something that all Washingtonians can help combat and reduce the impact of by doing all of the

recommended procedures (stay home if sick, hand wash/sanitize, protect those most vulnerable).

As a school district we recognize, and take very seriously, our responsibility to be as informed as possible, and as prepared as possible, as this circumstance evolves. It is also critical that we provide as much information as we have gathered to our community. Of our many commitments and priorities, the health, safety and well-being of our students and staff are paramount.

I participated in a conference call with Island County Health and schools in our area. According to the health department, children seem to be much more immune to the disease as only two people under the age of 19, across the State, have had a confirmed case of the virus and their symptoms were milder. The health department confirmed that our hygiene protocol in South Whidbey addresses the issues accomplished by district who close for “deep cleaning”. We know that our aging population and those with compromised health are most at risk. By stemming the tide of new disease, “delay the spread and reduce the peak of disease”, we are helping our hospitals care for those who are very ill. He asked that people postpone elective issues and use hospitals for critical care. This is why we have cancelled all events, asked for volunteers to come in on a case by case basis and only if they are well. We are working to keep our students and staff healthy so school will stay open.

Over the past number of weeks we have been working closely with experts and government and educational partners to learn as much as is known, and to be prepared as possible for the impacts and implications that COVID-19 may have for schools and school districts. Expert information continues to be provided by the public health and medical professionals associated with the Center for Disease Control, the Department of Health, and the local Regional Health District(s) that has jurisdiction in our school district. We are also in continual communication with the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, the Office of the Governor, our educational service district, and with fellow school districts and institutions of higher education in our region and across the state

As the science of this virus comes into sharper focus, and as its impacts continue to be felt in our state – albeit more significantly in other areas of the state at the current time – we are mindful of the potential for its impact to affect the normal operation of schools. In addition to our routine and now even increased attention to the cleaning of our facilities and buses, we know that growing concerns may lead to recommended decisions that could alter our regular operations. We respect that the Office of the Governor holds emergency powers and authority in circumstances like this, and

assuredly that public health agencies share in the authority relative to making decisions about a public school district's continued normal operation.

With a deep commitment to learning from the experts about the science and impacts of COVID-19, as well as to the health, safety and well-being of our students, staff and the larger community, we are continuing to make plans for a variety of outcomes and for any adjustments that may be needed or mandated. We will continue to keep you informed as we move forward, and we appreciate and value your partnership with us as we travel this new road.

For now, please continue to remember that the health and safety of all of us is best guarded by all of us. I am hoping that we can remain open by doing all we can to mitigate the spread of the virus. As parents and staff, you have the personal responsibility to take whatever actions needed for your health and the health of your family. Please continue to keep the sick at home, wash hands/sanitize frequently, and protect the vulnerable (the elderly and those with suppressed immune systems).

Following is a FAQ that provides general guidance for "social distancing".

Social Distancing Frequently Asked Questions

What is social distancing?

It's a common strategy for reducing the spread of disease. The closer the contact between people – and the more people in a group – the greater the risk of passing along viruses.

How close is too close?

Try to keep at least 3 to 6 feet away (1-2 meters) away from others. Avoid handshakes and hugs – use smiles and "hellos" instead. If you want some kind of physical contact, go for fist or shoulder bumps.

How many people are in "large group" that I should avoid?

The Snohomish Health District recommends avoiding groups of 50 or more, especially in poorly ventilated spaces.

It's hard to avoid people. When should I simply stay home?

Stay home when you have a serious condition such as diabetes, heart disease or lung disease or have a cough, fever, and/or difficulty breathing. People older than 60 are

especially vulnerable to the COVID 19 virus. Consider having groceries and supplies delivered.

Where can I learn more?

Check out our website pages dedicated to [COVID 19 linked here.](#)

Sincerely,

Dr. Jo Moccia

Superintendent