

March 13, 2020

Dear Newtown Staff and Families,

I wanted to express my deep gratitude for your efforts and support over the last two weeks, including the work to prepare supplemental materials and a potential distance learning model. No district, town, or state has a playbook for these kinds of emergencies, especially as it impacts students and learning. However, more importantly, we need to make decisions with an abundance of care and precaution.

With the above in mind, Newtown Public Schools will be closed for staff and students until further notice beginning Monday, March 16th.

This decision was made with the community's best interests in mind and in collaboration with our local health director. While Newtown has not currently identified any known cases or connections, we are closing to ensure social distancing, ongoing assessment of the situation as it impacts Newtown, and continued sanitization of our schools and offices.

Students have been provided supplemental learning materials in the event of a school closure. Since we would potentially have to make up these days, we want to ensure that there is no additional responsibility required of staff during this time. At the same time, we want to ensure that any work students engage in at home is both valued and counted when they return. I am currently in the process of applying to the State for a Distance Learning Waiver. Under such a Distance Learning Waiver school days would be counted, and the time and responsibility for teaching and learning required of staff and students would naturally increase. However, this would only be implemented based on the overall status of the health and wellness of staff, students, and families throughout the district.

In addition, I have taken the following actions:

- Continued direct communication with members of the Town Emergency Management Team, our First Selectman, Dan Rosenthal, and Director of Health, Donna Culbert, regarding COVID's status and the immediate impact on our community.
- Worked in alignment with local Superintendents, local health directors, the State Governor's office, and Commissioner of Education to receive updates on COVID's impact on the State.
- Worked with our Director of Facilities to ensure ongoing sanitizing of touchpoints in our schools, as well as cleaning during the evening to mitigate potential virus contamination while school remained open.
- Responded to concerns from parents and community members to assure steps were taken to implement precautionary measures across the district.

While all of the above has been implemented, this continues to be a volatile and ever-changing situation that impacts each and every one of us. You will continue to receive updates throughout our closure, as needed, through School Messenger. We will also post any important information on our District website at <https://www.newtown.k12.ct.us/>.

This is an amazing community that kept calm, offered a variety of supports on many levels and for one another, and continued a respectful dialogue to take strategic and timely steps in the best interest of the school community.

If a student or family needs to pick something up from one of the buildings, please know that you can do this between 3 and 5 p.m. today. Principals will remain in their buildings following the staff professional development day for this purpose.

Please take care of your families as this remains the most important thing right now beyond everything else. You know you can reach out to me at any time with any questions at 203-360-2566 (cell) or at the office at 203-426-7621.

Sincerely,

Dr. Lorrie Rodrigue, Superintendent