

AMESBURY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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March 15, 2020

Dear Families,

On Friday, after thoughtful consideration, and with the support of Mayor Cassandra Gove and the Amesbury School Committee, I decided to close the Amesbury Public Schools for the next two weeks (through Friday, March 27th). This decision was not taken lightly and was made as part of a pro-active effort to both contain the spread of the Coronavirus and with the health and well-being of our students and staff in mind. ***It should be noted that at this time we do not have any confirmed cases of COVID-19 in our schools.***

This closure (initially through Friday, 3/27, a total of 11 days) is considered part of the 185 day school year and will not need to be made up after the last planned snow day for each school (June 24th).

Below please find critical information relative to our schools closing:

- The School buildings will be open so that students can retrieve necessary personal items on the following days and times:
 - Monday 11am-3pm
 - Tuesday 8am-Noon

The nurses will be present so that those needing to retrieve medications may do so.
- **Other than the designated times noted above, all school building will be closed to the public from Monday, March 16th- thru Sunday, March 29th.**

As the purpose of this closure is to help slow the spread of the Coronavirus we are encouraging families to follow the guidance of the medical community and adhere to the practices of *social distancing*. It is our hope that by working collectively as a community we can help ensure the safety and well-being of our citizens.

The teachers and principals have been working together to make sure that your children will have opportunities to continue their learning during this closure. Our Director of Food Services and Director of Finance have arranged for students to continue to be fed, and the Director of Special Education is working to help support our students with special needs.

The School District is also offering its resources to the community at large and will be partnering with the City to offer van rides and meals to those in need.

I sincerely appreciate the tremendous support that the schools have seen from the community during this unprecedented time.

We will continue to update the community via the website and through our Blackboard Connect System.

Your child's Principal will be sending out individual messages that are specific to their schools.

Social Distancing

Below is some information from Asaf Bitton MD, MPH of Brigham and Women's Hospital and The Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health.

So what does this enhanced form of social distancing mean on a daily basis, when schools are cancelled?

1. No playdates, parties, sleepovers, or families visiting each other's houses. This sounds extreme because it is. We are trying to create distance between family units and between individuals across those family units. It is uncomfortable, especially for families with small children or for kids who love to play with their friends. But even if you choose only one friend to have over, you are creating new links and possibilities for the type of transmission that all of our school/work/public event closures are trying to prevent. The symptoms of coronavirus take 4-5 days to manifest themselves. Someone who comes over looking well can transmit the virus. Sharing food is particularly risky - I definitely do not recommend that people do so outside of their family. We have already taken extreme social measures to address this serious disease - let's not actively co-opt our efforts by having high levels of social interaction at people's houses instead of the schools. Again - the wisdom of early and aggressive social distancing is that it can flatten the curve above, give our health system a chance to not be overwhelmed, and eventually may reduce the length and need for longer periods of extreme social distancing later (see what has transpired in Italy and Wuhan). We need to all do our part during these times, even if it means some discomfort.

2. Take walks/runs outside, but maintain distance (ideally 6 feet between people outside your family). Try not to use public facilities like playground structures as coronavirus can live on plastic and metal for up to 3 days, and these structures aren't getting regularly cleaned. Try not to have physical contact with people outside of your family. Going outside will be important during these strange times, and the weather is improving. Go outside every day if you can but stay physically away from others.

Try not to have kids play with each other (even outside) if that means direct physical contact. Even basketball or soccer involve direct contact and cannot be recommended. If people wish to go outside and have a picnic with other families, I strongly recommend keeping distance of at least 6 feet, not sharing any food at all, and not having direct physical contact. Invariably, that is hard with kids, so these shared, "distant" picnics may be tricky. Do not visit nursing homes or other areas where large numbers of the elderly reside, as they are at highest risk for complications and mortality from coronavirus. We need to find alternate ways to reduce social isolation in these communities through virtual means instead of physical in-person visits.

3. Reduce the frequency of going to stores/restaurants/coffee shops for the time being. Of course trips to the grocery store will be necessary, but try to limit them and go at times when less busy. Consider wearing gloves (not medical - but perhaps washable) and of course washing hands before and after really well. Leave the medical masks and gloves for the medical professionals - we need them. Maintain social distance from folks. Take-out meals and food are riskier than making food at home given the links between the people who prepare food, transport the food, and you. It is hard to know how much that risk is, but it is certainly higher than making it at home.

4. If you are sick, definitely stay home and contact a medical professional. If you are sick, you should try isolate yourself from the rest of your family within your house as best as you can. If you have questions about whether you qualify or should get a coronavirus test, you can call your primary care team and/or consider calling the Partners Health Care hotline staffed 8AM-8PM every day - (617) 724-7000, or the Massachusetts Department of Public Health at (617) 983-6800. Don't just walk in to

an ambulatory clinic - call first. Obviously if it is an emergency call 911.

We have to try our absolute best as a community, starting today. It is a public health imperative. If we don't do this now voluntarily, it will become necessary later involuntarily, when the potential benefits will be much less than doing so right now.

Asaf Bitton MD, MPH | Executive Director | Ariadne Labs - Brigham and Women's Hospital | Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health

School Lunch

During the two week school closure, the Amesbury Public Schools will be providing our students breakfast and lunch daily for **FREE**. Beginning Tuesday, March 17, 2020, bagged lunches, as well as breakfast for the following day, will be offered for pick up between 11:30 a.m. and 1:00 p.m. at these two locations:

Amesbury High School, 5 Highland Street (side door at cafeteria entrance)

Amesbury Elementary School, 20 South Hampton Road (front entrance)

All Amesbury Public School students, regardless of their lunch benefit status, will receive a FREE complete, nutritious bagged breakfast and lunch. Meals may not be consumed at the pick-up site.

If you are an Amesbury student and cannot access any of these meal sites and are in need of lunch services, please reach out to the Director of Finance & Operations, Joan Liporto at liporto@amesburyma.gov or at 978-388-0507, x7019.

Special Education Information

These are extraordinary times and the information and guidance from local, state and federal authorities has resulted in decisions and actions that need to be nimble to adapt to the quickly changing environment. Please see the guidelines issued by the Office of Special Education Programming: [OSEP Guidance issued March 2020](#). At this time, the following district guidelines are in effect.

New Referrals/Initial Eligibility:

Amesbury Public Schools, along with other schools in the commonwealth, will freeze evaluation, referral, and plan distribution timelines for all students in a referral cycle during school closure. This means that as soon as schools open again, the timelines will commence as is required by state and federal regulations.

Annual Reviews/Evaluations in Process:

Amesbury Public Schools, along with other schools in the commonwealth, will freeze evaluation, referral, annual review, and plan distribution timelines for all students on IEPs and 504s during school closure. This means that as soon as schools open again, the timelines will commence as is required by state and federal regulations. Additionally, at that time we will be working with families to understand the impact of the closure on students.

Home Services/Tutoring:

Although home services or tutoring occurs outside of the school buildings, Amesbury Public Schools generally does not provide this support when school is not in session. For students currently on approved home service or tutoring, the behavior specialist and/or Special Education Team Facilitator will contact the family to ensure appropriate continuity of education, understanding that our ability to send staff or contracted service providers into homes is contingent upon their perceived health and wellness in accordance with state and CDC guidelines.

Counseling

If your child is in crisis, whereas they are a threat to themselves or others you can call mobile crisis at 978-521-7777, go directly to the closest Emergency Room, or call 911. For non-emergency situations, the school adjustment counselors will be checking their email during school hours and will answer any questions or respond to your concerns.

OOD/Residential Placements:

For students in Out-of-District day or residential placements, Amesbury Public Schools will follow the attendance recommendations of the individual school or facility.

OOD Transportation

At this time, when possible, Amesbury Public Schools will continue to transport students to out of district schools that remain open.

365 Day Residential Placements:

For students in 365 day residential placements, Amesbury Public Schools will follow the attendance recommendations of the individual school or facility. If the 365 day residential school decides to close, decisions will be made on a case by case basis, understanding that our ability to send staff or contracted service providers into homes is contingent upon their perceived health and wellness in accordance with and CDC guidelines.

We are in constant communication with our liaisons at both the state and federal level, and will communicate any updates as a district and department in a timely manner. If you have any question please call the Special Education Office at 978-388-0531.

Elementary Schools Information

During the next two weeks, we would like to provide families with educational resources and suggested learning activities. These are suggestions for you to provide your children with opportunities for continued access to educational materials. The elementary teachers are putting together a list of these suggested resources by grade level, and plan on sending it out by Thursday, March 19th. Until you receive these resources please continue to read with your child and spend time as a family!

Also please note that Elementary Report Card distribution will be postponed until school is back in session.

Middle and High School Information

Over the next two weeks, all Amesbury Middle and High School students should check their Google Classrooms, Aspen, and/or emails from their teachers to find the suggested learning activities for each of their classes. All suggested learning activities will be posted by Thursday, March 19th.

Athletics

At the time all athletics events, including try-outs, practices, and competitions are cancelled until March 30th.

Technology Needs

If your child needs assistance accessing technology during school closures, please contact Lyn Jacques, Director of Teaching & Learning at (978) 388-0507 or at jacquesl@amesburyma.gov.

In closing, thank you all for your attention, patience, and cooperation.

Thank you also for your continued support of the Amesbury school community as we work to support our families, students and each other during this unprecedented and troubling time.

We will continue to keep everyone informed as we learn new information or as the situation evolves.

With appreciation and well wishes for all,

Jared Fulgoni
Superintendent of Schools
Amesbury Public Schools