

Somerset Public Schools

Somerset Berkley Regional School District

All Students Achieving Excellence

March 12, 2020

Dear Families,

As of the writing of this memorandum, there are still no known confirmed or presumptive cases of COVID-19 (coronavirus) in the Somerset Public Schools, Somerset Berkley Regional High School, the towns of Somerset and Berkley, or Bristol County. Understandably, concerns regarding coronavirus continue to grow. In Somerset and Somerset Berkley, we continue to receive updates and follow guidance from the Massachusetts Department of Public Health (DPH) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Some changes identified below are a result of Governor Baker's declaration of a state of emergency earlier this week and the subsequent recommendations from the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) and the Town of Somerset's Board of Health.

Governor Baker has urged employers and other large organizations to "limit or eliminate non-essential travel" and "limit or eliminate large events where possible." Applying these recommendations to schools has resulted in the cancellation of several activities in Somerset and Somerset Berkley, including field trips, music competitions, today's career fair at SBRHS, and tomorrow's Black and White Semi-Formal for our juniors and seniors, among other activities. One such event that I canceled yesterday is this Sunday's winter guard and percussion competition that SBRHS was set to host. Approximately twenty high schools from three New England states were expected to attend including at least two school districts that now have presumptive cases or quarantined students due to the coronavirus. I have made the decision to cancel field trips through April vacation. We will revisit this in mid-April to determine whether or not this decision needs to extend further into the school year.

The school districts are also temporarily limiting access to the school buildings for discretionary gatherings and community events. These include access to the high school indoor walking track (the outdoor track is available), youth basketball practices and games, school dances and other social/PTO-sponsored events, and the Somerset Berkley Education Foundation's Magic of Lyn performance on 3/28. The Somerset Middle School's musical production of Camp Rock has been postponed from March 19-20 to May 7-8. Building principals will be communicating school-specific information with families about field trips and various gatherings and meetings.

Lastly, Commissioner Riley communicated a determination regarding student attendance, which has led to some confusion. Chronic absenteeism is a metric that is used by DESE to determine school and district accountability ratings. Chronic absenteeism is defined as missing 10% or more of the school year, which is 18 days over a 180 day school year. This year, DESE will not track chronic absenteeism beyond this point only for school and district accountability purposes. DESE has reaffirmed to school districts that attendance must be collected and reported each day. Local school policies regarding attendance as described in the student handbooks are still in place; student attendance is still be recorded each day. We understand that parents and guardians will make decisions based on what you believe is best for the health and well-being of your child. In the event that school cancellations in Somerset and Somerset Berkley must be made, please plan accordingly.

Whereas the last scheduled day of school is Tuesday, June 16, 2020, we will be required by DESE to make up missed days of school through Monday, June 22, 2020, in the event of multiple cancellations.

As I have noted previously and will continue to emphasize, many of the precautions that help prevent colds and the flu can help protect against other respiratory viruses such as the coronavirus. The Massachusetts Department of Public Health recommends the following precautions that we can all take to remain as healthy as possible:

- Practice good hand hygiene. Wash your hands often and thoroughly with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands. Use Alcohol-based hand sanitizer when soap and water are not available.
- When coughing and sneezing, cover your mouth and nose with a tissue. You can also cough or sneeze into your sleeve. Throw used tissues in the trash and immediately wash your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds.
- Stay away from people who are sick and stay home when you are sick.

Below are several reputable and informative resources that are available to you to learn more about COVID-19. include the following:

- [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#)
- [Massachusetts Department of Health](#)
- [World Health Organization](#)

If you have specific questions, please do not hesitate to contact your child's school. We remain deeply committed to student and staff wellness and will continue to take all appropriate measures to minimize the risk of contracting and transmitting the coronavirus in our schools. We will continue to share pertinent information with you, as necessary, about this evolving situation.

Sincerely,

Jeffrey Schoonover