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Dear South Orange & Maplewood Families,

The South Orange & Maplewood School District continues to work in partnership with our local, state, and federal health agencies to receive and share daily updates, guidance and mandates surrounding the coronavirus disease, or COVID-19. We will continue to work with Public Health Officials at the town, county, and state level as we make decisions that impact all of us.

At this time, there are no known or reported cases of COVID-19 in Essex County. Currently, there are 15 positive cases of COVID-19 in New Jersey. I am also in close contact with many colleagues at nearby school districts. A number of schools have closed because of COVID-19 exposure, while others are doing so to prepare for the potential impact of contamination. We understand that closing schools is disruptive to the lives of our district families; at this time, therefore, our District is not planning to close schools.

***We will be shifting Friday, March 13th to an early-dismissal day for the entire school district (this date was previously scheduled as a parent-teacher conference early-dismissal for elementary schools only).*** Our District team has been working with key staff members on the development of an offsite learning plan in case of a long-term closure. While we do not believe that additional full days for professional development are necessary to complete this plan, we do want to provide our teachers with a timely review of the extended academic student assignments.

In the event that we experience a confirmed positive COVID-19 case in the School District of South Orange and Maplewood (staff or student), we will close all schools in our school district for 24 hours. During this 24 hour-period, every school building will be deep-cleaned, and we will reassess the concern with our local health officers to determine next steps.

The District will put an offsite learning plan into effect only if dire circumstances force a long-term school closure or if the New Jersey Department of Health (NJDOH) orders our schools to close for an extended period to control the spread of the virus. The closure of District schools would not only create child care challenges and other disruptions for district parents/guardians but would also suspend critical and social services for hundreds of our families. We hope to avoid that eventuality if possible. If we do need to implement an offsite plan, it will involve multiple modes of sharing learning and assignments with students, likely including some online work for many students. For the first time ever, the New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) will allow schools to utilize online learning to satisfy the 180-school-day requirement if the New Jersey Department of Health (NJDOH)

I would like to provide you with a few updates on what our District is doing to prepare for the potential impact of COVID-19 on our schools.

- A draft framework has been developed for our educational approach to offsite learning for Early Childhood, Elementary, Middle, and High School and Special Services students. Our Curriculum and Instruction team is now formalizing our approach to ensure that the design offers consistency across all grade levels and secondary courses. The team will work with subject-level and grade-level supervisors (i.e., teachers and department leader) to provide input and details and assignment design.
- We are working to establish Google Classroom sites specifically for each grade level in each school from 3<sup>rd</sup> – 12<sup>th</sup> grades. (Assignments would be graded.)
- Technology needs and gaps are being reviewed to determine hardware capacity. We have a diverse student population, and some of our students do not have regular access to technology or the internet. We will ensure that all students will have equal access to learning.
- We are assessing the language translation needs for parental guidelines.
- Services and logistics for out-of-district placement for students with severe disabilities and special needs are being assessed.
- Since, by law, the district must continue providing meals to students who qualify for free or reduced-price lunch if schools are closed due to COVID-19, we are planning for this scenario with our food service vendor.
- Finally, we are requesting that teachers provide activities/syllabi to any students who have to self-quarantine for a prolonged period.

In response to recommendations by the CDC (the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention) to limit social contact, the District has reviewed upcoming events that were to bring large groups of students, adults, and community members together, as well as upcoming field trips. It has been determined that the following postponements/cancelations are necessary:

- The **Matilda** performances scheduled for Columbia High School are postponed. I have been in personal contact with Principal Morgan and the show's director, Bethany Pettigrew, and we will continue the conversation on how to provide opportunities for our cast and crew to share their production with those who have purchased tickets.
- Our **Parent/Teacher Conferences** scheduled for this week will no longer be face-to-face. We are encouraging our teachers, principals, and school-based personnel to support telephone conferences, Skype conferences, and other alternatives.
- We will create a digital alternative to our **Intentional Integration Town Hall**, which is scheduled for next Wednesday, March 18.
- A moratorium has been placed on all **field trips** until further notice. The **First Tech Challenge (FTC) New Jersey Robotics State Championship** that was scheduled for Columbia High School has also been postponed.

Additionally, we continue to implement all of the preventative measures as we have indicated in prior communications. Within our buildings, custodial staff members are cleaning common and high-traffic areas several times a day, and we are providing resources, supplies, and time for students to wash their hands regularly. Our cleanliness expectations were reiterated to our custodial staff during recent trainings. Hand sanitizer continues to be distributed to every classroom teacher in the district. We have also implemented a daily sanitizing schedule for our school buses. Lastly, in a preponderance of caution, we will proceed with a new weekend deep-cleaning methodology utilizing electrostatic disinfectant sprayers for each school building (beginning this Saturday).

Please help us by keeping sick children at home. We are asking anyone with symptoms of any illness stay home for a minimum of 48 hours without a fever. If a student exhibits illness or COVID-19 related symptoms, the school nurse will contact a parent or guardian to come pick them up immediately.

We recognize how challenging this situation is for our families, students, and staff, and we take this situation seriously. We are taking real-time preventative measures in response to new information that key agencies provide.

Our goal is to keep our doors open as long as possible while prioritizing the health and safety of our students and staff. Thank you for working with us through this evolving situation that impacts all facets of life in our entire community. We will continue to provide you with regular updates.

Educationally Yours,

Dr. Ronald G. Taylor  
Superintendent of Schools

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### **COVID-19 Updates in NJ (as of 3/9/20)**

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In conjunction with the NJ Department of Health and our local health departments, we want to provide you with the most up-to-date information on the coronavirus (as of 3/9/20), as news and updates are changing constantly.

1. There are currently 15 positive cases of coronavirus in New Jersey (*updated as of 3/10*)
2. The CDC advises that those over the age of 60 and those with underlying health conditions should practice social distancing and avoid large crowds in public spaces and large gatherings. Examples of public spaces include anywhere that people can freely gather in significant numbers: malls, grocery stores, the movie theatre, concert halls, libraries, gyms, and community centers.
3. We are advised to reconsider travel plans by plane and to continually follow the travel advisories by the CDC.
4. To prevent the spread of any respiratory disease, please practice RESPIRATORY ETIQUETTE. That means the following:
  - ✓ Cover your cough or your sneeze with the elbow of your sleeve or with a tissue and throw it away;
  - ✓ Wash your hands for 20 seconds and use a paper towel to open the door if you are in a public space, or use hand sanitizer;
  - ✓ Wash your hands every time after being in a public space;
  - ✓ Stay home if you are sick; and
  - ✓ Get a flu shot. While the flu shot does not prevent coronavirus, it can help strengthen your immune system and keep you healthier during this time.
5. The CDC advises that those who have traveled to a Level 3 Travel advisory area should self-monitor or self-quarantine at home and practice social distancing for 14 days from the time of departure from that country.
  - ✓ When you are self-quarantining/ self-monitoring, you may not have any symptoms.
  - ✓ If you are self-monitoring, please practice social distancing. Social distancing is staying away from public spaces, and not attending social events.
6. If you have traveled, or have come in contact with a positive case of coronavirus and are exhibiting signs and symptoms of cough, fever, and shortness of breath, please call your health care provider. Inform them by phone of your travel or exposure history and your symptoms BEFORE you go to the doctor's office or to the emergency room.

7. Starting this week, your health care provider can write a prescription for you to get a COVID-19 lab test at a commercial lab such as Quest or LabCorp. However, the lab will not test you unless you meet the symptom criteria of coughing, fever, and shortness of breath and have had exposure to a positive COVID-19 case or a recent travel history.
8. If you have any questions about self-monitoring during this time, please call the 24-hour state hotline for COVID-19: (800) 222-1222.
9. Yesterday afternoon, as part of the state's coordinated response to address the novel coronavirus outbreak, Governor Phil Murphy declared a State of Emergency and a Public Health Emergency, effective immediately, to ramp up New Jersey's efforts to contain the spread of COVID-19. Executive Order No. 103 declares a state of emergency and public health emergency across all 21 counties in New Jersey, allowing state agencies and departments to utilize state resources to assist affected communities responding to and recovering from COVID-19 cases.