

Tuesday, March 10, 2020: Important Coronavirus Update

Dear Princeton Charter School Families,

At this time of unknowns and understandable anxiety over the Coronavirus spread, it is important that the adults model a calm and rational approach to preparing for and responding to this reality. Children will observe and absorb our energy, so it is important that we are measured and mindful of how we are teaching our children to respond to adversity and challenge.

Information is rapidly changing regarding the impact of the Coronavirus known as COVID-19 as we receive new updates daily from the [New Jersey Department of Education](#) (NJDOE), the [New Jersey Department of Health](#) (NJDOH) and of course from the barrage of news media reports. Yesterday, Governor Murphy declared a state of emergency in NJ in order to broaden the powers of state agencies to address this situation. Here is a synopsis of the school's plans and preparations as of today. Much more information will certainly unfold over the next week or two as the situation with the Coronavirus, COVID-19 continues to develop.

We are focused on the safety of the students and staff as the highest priority, while also considering carefully how to maintain learning continuity for our students.

We have received a great deal of guidance from the State, the Department of Education, and the local Health Department. Last week I was on a statewide call moderated by Governor Murphy that included updates from the Commissioner of Health, the State Epidemiologist, and the Commissioner of Education. I have spoken directly with the Princeton Health Department Officer, Jeff Grosser. I also attended a meeting with Mercer County superintendents at which the health officers from Trenton, Princeton, West Windsor, Hamilton, Hopewell, Pennington, and also the Mercer County DOH official addressed the group. And, yesterday morning, I was on a call with the Department of Education Office of Charter Schools. This guidance has been helpful as we develop and refine our plan.

Last week, our own school planning group met to work on the various considerations. The group included:

1. Larry Patton - Head of School
2. Lisa Eckstrom - Assistant Head of School
3. Gail Wilbur - Assistant Head of School
4. Paula Davis - School Nurse
5. Kathy McKenzie - School Nurse
6. Rob Hemrich - School Doctor
7. Olga Troyanskaya - Board Member
8. Taru Sinha - Parent/Medical Doctor, RWJ
9. Sue Kushner - School Counselor
10. Patrick Byrne - Facilities Director

Here is some helpful information as context for the decision-making process and also some of the actions that we have taken in order to prevent, and prepare for potential closure.

[The Princeton Department of Health](#) is the main agency that will guide us during this coronavirus spread. Ultimately, it will be the Princeton Health Officer who issues the directive to close school, however, the school would be in communication with the Health Officer as part of the decision making process. We are in direct contact with the Princeton Health Director, Jeff Grosser, and with our school doctor, Rob Hemrich, who is in contact with the health department and is also the school doctor for Princeton Public Schools. Our nurses are in communication with the Princeton Health Department nurse, and we are receiving regular updates from that office. Mr. Grosser has been outstanding in his guidance and availability during such a busy time. Please know that if there is a need to close school, it will most likely be for a prolonged period of at least two (2) weeks.

Facilities: I have spoken to our cleaning service, Dakota Cleaning Services, and reiterated the importance for the cleaning staff to wipe down high frequency surfaces. We have Clorox wipes available for teachers and students to wipe down desks, chrome books, etc. as well. Dispensers for hand sanitizer are being installed in all rooms, and we have ordered ample cases of sanitizer and Clorox wipes to augment our existing supply.

At this time, there is no recommendation for a “deep clean” from the Department of Health. However, over our spring break, we will do a deep clean.

DOE: We have been receiving updates and guidance as to the implications of a prolonged closure. As per the meeting I attended on Friday with the county superintendents, we were given this guidance on school closures and the impact on the required number of days for public schools:

- If a district receives a written directive from DOH or local health agency to close and the district provides home and/or online instruction, the closure days will count to 180 minimum days. Districts must submit a plan to the county Department of Education superintendent’s office.
- If a district closes voluntarily (without written directive from a health agency), the closure days will not count to 180 minimum days even if home and/or online instruction is provided.
- If a parent selects to keep child(ren) home, they are subject to the school’s attendance policy.

There are four criteria that our plan must include for remote learning days to count toward the 180 requirements per the latest DOE memorandum.

1. Written directive from DOH or local health agency ordering closure
2. Equitable access to services for all students
3. Address the provision of appropriate education for Special Education students
4. Provision of school nutrition benefits for eligible students.

We are working to develop the plan for the state and are addressing the remote learning, food, access, and Special Education aspects of the requirement.

Remote Learning: Teachers are preparing for the possibility of a school closing and planning to provide students with learning activities using the existing tech available to us now:

- PowerSchool Unified Classroom (upper grades)

- Post lessons, activities, links, videos, forms, discussions
- Google Apps for Education
 - Create a shared folder with all students/parents in order to post worksheets, assignments sheets, post links, etc.
 - Use google forms for assessment and feedback from students
 - Email information directly to parents; create an email list that will be used to bcc information to families.

These will provide immediate means to share and collect work with students. We are also exploring and planning training for staff on additional options for applications and technology e.g. Google Hangouts, Youtube, Zoom, Edpuzzle, Kahoot, Screencastify, etc.

We are currently considering asynchronous learning activities, but we may be able to offer synchronous activities as we explore various applications.

Learning Materials: Teachers may be sending materials home for students to have in place if we end up closing with little notice. So teachers may ask students to keep textbooks at home for now, if it is possible to do so. Do not be alarmed if textbooks are sent home, it is not a signal that we are *about* to close; it is a prudent step in preparing for this possible, and I have to say, likely outcome.

No Report Card Comments: As you may know, some school districts are closing in order to allow staff time to plan for remote learning. I feel that the idea of closing school now, when we are still able to hold classes, and given that children may be faced with being out of school for a prolonged period of time, is not ideal to say the least. In order to have the time to prepare, rather than close, we will not have individualized report card comments this trimester only. This will allow teachers to train and plan instead of the many hours that go into writing comments. In addition, we are going to cancel the curriculum committees planned for Friday and use this time for staff training. School will be dismissed on Friday March 13, at noon.

Impact on Trips: We will be considering the impact of this coronavirus on our planned trips. We need to be prepared for these trips to be cancelled, especially out of state trips. We will be monitoring the changing landscape in order to make the best decision, and we will not make any unnecessarily premature decisions, i.e. the 8th grade DC trip is a long way off and the situation may be very different at the end of May.

Impact on School Events: Assemblies, the school play, athletic events, and visiting speakers will need to be assessed on a case-by-case basis to determine whether or not we should have the event. We will reach out to the Princeton Health Department for guidance.

Precautions: We must continue to follow best practice in terms of hand hygiene as we have stressed. Continue to remind students to wash hands, cough into elbow, etc.

I found this article a helpful reminder of best practices:

<https://www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2020/03/coronavirus-what-you-can-do-help-slow-outbreak/607369/>

Follow the CDC and DOH releases for updates. Please communicate with our nurses, Paula Davis and Kathy McKenzie if you are potentially symptomatic with COVID-19 or if you are in a situation that requires a self-quarantine. They can be reached at (609) 924-0575 x2403 or Nurse@princetoncharter.org.

Communication: We will try to communicate frequently with any updates and information.

Finally, we rely on your cooperation in implementing any plans and following any guidelines, so thank you in advance for your help and understanding during this time.

Sincerely,

Larry Patton