

Dear Parents/Guardians,

Flyers:

None

Coronavirus Issues:

Background:

The last week and a half has been quite a ride as we went from a standing start with no plans to having a viable virtual instructional plan for a health-related closure in our district. I want to review some of these important steps, then review in detail planning for the coming week.

With the original guidance from the New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE), we were told to develop a plan for virtual instruction remotely if we were mandated to close for a health related reason. Two key components were required in that plan: 1) equity in that all students would have the same services; and, 2) food service, that students on a free/reduced lunch (77% of our students) would have access to their meals.

As the days progressed and we were quickly developing our plans, guidance was changing as fast as we were writing. The plan that we finalized and turned into the County Superintendent this past Thursday has us doing instruction via computer for grades 2-8, and with materials sent home and guidance via teacher web pages for grades PK, K, and 1. We were subsequently told that we didn't have to serve food, but we decided to keep that component in the plan, as long as we can keep the building open. We knew that some of our families did not have a computer device at home, so we started issuing out district Chromebooks to those that indicated they needed them. We knew that some of our homes did not have Internet, so we have secured wifi devices for those cases and are awaiting delivery of those devices.

Let me say right off that none of us believe virtual home instruction is equal in any way to what in person instruction can achieve in our schools. We have developed this virtual instruction plan with what we have so that students could have minimal instruction while the district was closed for a health-related reason, and so those days on home instruction can count towards the 180-day requirement for schooling.

Originally we were told that doing home instruction virtually would only be credited for the 180-day requirement if the local health officer or state wide health officer recommended in writing that the school or district to be closed. However, last week that strict requirement seemed to change to something less precise. In following various districts statewide, it was obvious that some districts were closing without the recommendation of their health officer and indicating that the NJDOE would count the days towards the 180-day requirement. This ambiguity was causing much confusion, both within school leaders, and from the communities seeing an asymmetrical response to what seemed to be a common problem.

Yesterday things came to a head. Yesterday morning all of the Superintendents met for the monthly roundtable meeting, and all of the Monmouth County health officers were present in the same room. It was clear that the new guidance was now that a district could close and start virtual instruction, provided

we had consultation with the health officer and County Superintendent. A written recommendation for closure from the health officer was no longer necessary. In fact, most Health Officers were still not ready to recommend closure unless there was a confirmed Coronavirus case in the school.

The eight districts comprising our regional area huddled together after this meeting. This includes the Freehold Regional High School District and the seven K-8 districts that feed into it: Freehold Boro, Freehold Twp, Howell Twp, Farmingdale, Marlboro, Colts Neck and Manalapan/Englishtown. It was our collective opinion that the amount of cases showing up in the area with both confirmed cases and those associated with them without test results merited closing the school presumptively to prevent spread and establishing social distancing. The Governor's recommendation to not have public gatherings of more than 250 was also a consideration. Yesterday afternoon we waited for the Governor's press conference to see if he was going to presumptively close the schools in New Jersey. When he did not take this action (although he says he may do it within days), our eight districts put out the notification that we in the region would close for two weeks and then reevaluate.

Although we are all closed for two weeks, that doesn't mean that we are doing the same thing. In Freehold Boro we are using Monday as a non-instruction day, sort of like a snow day if you will. We need this time to organize our food service and to finish giving out computer devices. Teachers will use the time to adjust their instruction to this new mode. Starting Tuesday we will begin our virtual instruction and the day will count towards our 180-day requirement.

So in Freehold Boro, Monday will use one of our three snow days. We will then proceed with our regular district calendar on Tuesday. If we don't need the remaining two snow days, we would take them off the end of the year. Freehold Regional High School is doing something different. You just need to know that we are not all doing the same thing. Freehold Boro and Howell Twp are taking the same approach. This is important as Howell Twp provides our busing services under a shared services agreement. Thus we always make sure we are aligned with Howell.

Looking at the big picture, we really don't know what is going to happen with this Coronavirus pandemic. We may well be out longer than two weeks. Although we will have staff in the building on Monday, thereafter we will only have minimal staff to distribute the food, continue cleaning/disinfecting the buildings, and other essential functions. The rest of the staff will be working from home, following the principle of social distancing and reducing contact. However, all staff members are available and working during their normal work schedules, whether called into the buildings or working from home.

These Superintendent Blasts only go to those who signed up to receive them. Since information sharing will be so critical during this time, we will set up access to all my blasts through our webpage, and we will start to translate them into Spanish as well.

That is the general picture. Now let me go into some specifics on food, technology and instruction.

Food:

For those students on free/reduced lunch, we have mailed you a meal card. With that card you will be able to drive to the rear of PAC where we offload students by the cafeteria, and pick up your food. You

will not have to get out of your car. This will be the sole pickup point for food in the district, serving students from FLC, PAE and FIS.

Our goal is to give you food to be consumed one day and enough shelf stable food for the next. This will cut down on you need to come in each day. All the shelf-stable food has not arrived yet, so in the early days we may instead give you food that must be consumed that day. We will have messages to those coming for the food as the days go on. The times for food pickup will be 9am-12 noon. This will start Tuesday, March 17th. Breakfast and lunch will be distributed at the same time.

If students/parents must self-quarantine or otherwise are sick such that they can't leave home to pickup the school breakfast/lunch, please let us know and we will try to work to get food to the house through the established Monmouth County OEM network.

Technology:

For those parents who indicated through our survey that they require a Chromebook at home, and were not issued that device yesterday, you will be called on Monday and be given a time to come to the Park Avenue Complex to pick up the device. To ensure your child's device is ready do not come prior to being contacted.

The FIS main entrance will be closed. All business needs to be done at the PAE main entrance. It is essential that devices get into students' hands on Monday. However, we will likely be doing this into Tuesday. For parents who have not filled out the Internet Access Survey, please do so immediately. As noted, we will be calling parents for picking up devices on Monday, and possibly Tuesday as well.

For any parent/student with technical problems, such as being locked out of Genesis, please forward an email to techstaff@freeholdboro.k12.nj.us

Information for Virtual Learning

The district is providing continued academic instruction during this health-related closure. Continued instruction takes place through virtual learning, a learning experience that is enhanced through utilizing computers and/or the Internet to provide instruction in an online environment. Staff and students will continue to follow their regular schedule to immerse and engage in virtual learning.

Information for Students and Parents

- a. District and school websites will serve as the main hub for sharing updates, information, and directions for students and parents to complete schoolwork and assignments.
- b. Teachers sent home with students their textbooks, workbooks, notebooks, and/or work packets.
- c. Specific updates and information for instruction and schoolwork should be accessed through their Teacher's Page, available within the school's website.
- d. Students and parents can and should communicate with teachers via email and/or Google Classroom.

- e. All students are provided opportunities to bring home technology device and/or access to the Internet.
- f. All students are expected to be virtually on standby following their regular schedule and ready to receive instruction, support, ask questions, and interact with their teachers. Students and parents should consult with teachers if unable to participate in virtual learning following their regular schedule to discuss how to complete work assignments.

Instructional Plan

- a. Teachers and students will follow their regular schedule during virtual learning. That means ELA, Math, Science, Social Studies, and VAPA lessons are taking place during their normal scheduled times.
- b. Teacher Pages are updated daily, and instructions/directions for virtual learning are provided.
- c. Students can utilize their textbooks and workbooks with specific guidance from teachers.
- d. Students will utilize online resources with specific guidance from teachers.
- e. Grades PK – 1: Students in this grade band may not be fully developmentally competent in utilizing computers and technology to support virtual learning. Therefore, teachers and staff sent home students and parents with work packets, textbooks, and workbooks. Specific instructions and directions are addressed to parents/guardian, explaining what schoolwork needs to be completed and what resources to use to support their children. Teacher Pages are utilized to outline and explain schoolwork and assignments. Parents should get in touch with teachers when needed about any of the assignments.
- f. Grades 2 – 8: Students in this grade band are fully competent in utilizing computers and technology to support virtual learning. Teacher Pages include link to their Google Classroom, the main platform for virtual learning.

Health Concerns:

In a follow up broadcast I will provide details of how you can keep us informed via the school nurses on the health status of our students. We are interested to know if any are on self-quarantine, or have actually contracted the Coronavirus.

Summary:

As detailed as I have been here, please understand that there will be much more to pass on in the coming days. Please remain alert for subsequent messages. Our focus now is on getting virtual instruction going. We will then shift to assessing how to rationalize all our events with this closure. We know this process will have some problems, but we will be responsive to solve issues as they come up. Remember, we are all on duty during the normal work days. We just have to work around the social distancing requirements.

Upcoming Events:

Mon, Mar 16: No school (coordinate technology distribution)
Mon, Mar 16: BOE Meeting (7pm/PAC New Cafeteria) (tentative budget approval)
Tue, Mar 17: Virtual Learning Day (coordinate technology stragglers)
Wed, Mar 18: Virtual Learning Day
Thu, Mar 19: Virtual Learning Day
Fri, Mar 20: Virtual Learning Day
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Mon, Mar 23: Virtual Learning Day
Tue, Mar 24: Virtual Learning Day
Wed, Mar 25: Virtual Learning Day
Thu, Mar 26: Virtual Learning Day
Fri, Mar 27: Virtual Learning Day
Sat, Mar 28: PAE PTO Basket Raffle [under review]
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Sat, Apr 4: FIS PTO Vendor Fair [under review]
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Mon, Apr 6: End Marking Period 3
Mon, Apr 6: BOE Meeting (7pm/PAC New Cafeteria)
Wed, Apr 8: Early dismissal, start of spring break
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Mon, Apr 20: Schools reopen
Mon, Apr 20: BOE Meeting (7pm/PAC New Cafeteria)
Thu, Apr 23: PK/K Registration (by appointment)
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Tue, Apr 28: PK/K Registration (by appointment)
Wed, Apr 29: Title I Parent Involvement Night (Math)
Thu, Apr 30: PK/K Registration (by appointment)
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Mon, May 4: Start NJSLA state assessment testing - FIS

Thank you.

Rocco Tomazic
Superintendent

