

**March 17, 2020**

Good Afternoon,

Given Governor Reynolds' most recent [press release](#), we are cancelling the student personal belongings, and technology device pick-up day scheduled for tomorrow Wednesday, March 18, 2020. While we have a strong desire to serve our students and families, we do not want to run the risk of creating environments that put our employees, our students, or our community at risk.

We have been working on a case-by-case basis to make arrangements for pick-up with families who may have needed essentials such as medication, or assistive devices, that was left at school. If you have an essential item that might need to be retrieved from school this week, please contact the appropriate building principal via email or phone to make arrangements to pick those items up. Please be aware that, at this time, we do not view district tech devices, or school work to be essential. If circumstances change, we will reassess, and make new arrangements to have day when we are open for picking up non-essentials.

I do want to acknowledge the work our district Technology Team did over the past 24 hours to put us in a position to get technology out to students. We were deep in preparation, and about to send directions out to staff when the newest press release came out, and we had a change of plans. A huge thank you to Kurt DeVore, Shannon Quandahl, Lee Fullhart, and Theresa Stortz for your hard work.

Again, please be aware that our buildings will remain closed tomorrow, and for the foreseeable future. The student retrieval day scheduled for tomorrow is cancelled.

Stay safe, and thank you for your support of Decorah Schools.

Mark M. Lane, Superintendent of Schools

**March 16, 2020**

Good Morning,

This morning the following Decorah Community School District staff met to engage in initial conversations regarding the governor's recommended four-week school closure.

- Mark Lane, Superintendent
- Cathy Dietzenbach, Director of Business Services
- Kurt DeVore, Director of Information, Systems, & Instructional Technology
- Dana Bockman, Facilitator of Assessment and Instruction
- Lois Kuennen, CAO Administrative Assistant
- Darlene Woodhouse, Director of Human Resources
- Kristi Roffman, Nutrition Services Administrative Assistant
- Jim Samuelson, Transportation Director
- Greg Schaller, Custodial, Maintenance, & Grounds Director
- Chad Elliott, Nutrition Services Director
- Kim Sheppard, DHS Principal
- Adam Riley, DHS Associate Principal/Activities Director
- Justin Albers, DMS Principal
- Jake Nimrod, DMS Associate Principal/Activities Director
- Sarah Tobiason, CLE Principal
- Rick Varney, WSECC/JCE Principal
- Julie Goedken, School Nurse
- Sarah Elsbernd, Facilitator of Special Education

The team worked through the following agenda items:

- Questions and Anticipated Questions
- Potential Come and Go Day for Students and Families
- Nutrition Services Options During Closure
- Next Steps

We started our meeting individually generating questions that we need to answer in order to manage this situation well. We then began developing initial possible approaches and scenarios.

At this point, we need to receive additional guidance and direction from the Iowa Department of Education, the Governor's Office, and the Iowa Legislature to know which approaches will meet the needs of our community, and will align with Iowa Code.

**Here are some things we do know now.**

District facilities are closed for school and all activities until further notice. There will be no open gyms, no park and rec use, no community use, no use of district facilities including classrooms, gyms, weight rooms, and/or fields. **At this time no one should be at school unless it is at the direction of a district administrator.**

We are in the planning phases of an organized and managed day, or days, when students and families will have access to their school to collect personal belongings. This day will include access to district issued technology for home use. The DCSD tech team is meeting as I write this message discussing needs and processes for making this happen.

We are already planning for how we might provide breakfast and/or lunch options for students. More information will be coming as plans are finalized.

We know other states are allowing schools to move to online learning options. Current Iowa law does not allow for online learning to count as student instructional time. This may be something Governor Reynolds and the Iowa Legislature address today, or in the next few days. My hope is that we will have a better understanding of the viability of this option by the end of the day tomorrow.

At this time, I cannot answer questions about make-up days in June. If there is no change to Iowa law, or no plan for all or a portion of time missed to be forgiven, I expect we will need to make up the lost instructional time in the same way we make up for lost days due to weather. I need more information from Governor Reynolds and the Iowa Legislature, and the department of education to know how we will be moving forward with make-up days.

Any IEP meetings scheduled for the next few days will be cancelled and rescheduled. We will reassess after we learn more from the department of education and our AEA partners.

I am expecting a press conference by the governor at some point today. Keystone AEA superintendents will enter a Zoom meeting immediately following that press conference, and the team listed above is scheduled to meet again at 3:00 pm this afternoon.

If I did not answer a specific question you have, please feel free to email, but please be understanding that it will take time for me to get to individual responses. You can expect additional communication this afternoon or evening after we learn more.

We know we have been presented with an unprecedented opportunity to serve our community well. No group of Decorah educators have ever been asked to do what we are being asked to do. Please know we will embrace this with a mindset of service excellence. We will work to do what is best for our students, families, and staff.

Thanks for your patience, and thank you for your support of Decorah Schools.

Mark M. Lane, Superintendent of Schools.

**March 13, 2020**

Good Afternoon,

At the time of writing the message to K-12 schools from the Iowa Departments of Public Health and Education continues to be to keep schools open and operating under the guidance we have been using all week. Governor Reynolds will be holding a press conference at 4:30 pm this afternoon. We will take in any new information shared during this press conference, along with any new guidance from the Departments of Public Health and Education, and develop our plans for next week. We will continue to communicate with families, students, and staff as we receive new information.

I also want to address an issue that has been brought to me several times in the past few days. I have received a number of calls and emails asking for advice and guidance on how to handle situations of families or staff returning from recent travel, or if people should cancel pending travel plans. My best recommendations are to stay current with travel related information from Iowa Public Health, and the U.S. Center for Disease Control. If you have specific questions, you should contact Winneshiek Public Health, your family doctor, or you can also call 211 for COVID-19 related questions.

We have been, and will continue to work with any family, student, or staff person in coordination with Winneshiek County Public Health, or a family doctor to understand potential travel related COVID-19 risks. Below you will find a summary of current travel-related information.

### **Before Travel**

Most COVID-19 cases are associated with travel to or from China, person-to-person spread is now being reported in other places, including Iran, Italy, Japan and South Korea. For the general public, who are unlikely to be exposed to the virus at this time, the immediate health risk from COVID-19 is low.

Iowa Department of Public Health is asking Iowans returning from a country where novel coronavirus (COVID-19) is spreading to voluntarily self-isolate for 14 days following their return. Areas in this travel notice currently include: Italy, Japan and South Korea. This is a rapidly evolving health situation, please visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)'s website for the most up-to-date travel information.

At this present time, the CDC does not have any guidance on restricting travel in the United States. Again, this is current information and may change when you return from your trip. If you have questions regarding travel, please call your local health department.

### **During Travel**

Promote and practice personal protective measures and illness prevention strategies to slow the spread of viruses. The best way to prevent ANY illness is to avoid being exposed to a virus.

There are simple everyday preventive actions to help prevent the spread of respiratory viruses including:

- Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol.
- Cover your cough or sneeze, preferably with a tissue, then dispose of the tissue in the trash and wash hands.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces.

It is vital to protect the most vulnerable individuals during the COVID-19 pandemic. If you have chronic conditions such as lung disease, heart disease, diabetes, cancer or a weakened immune system, avoid unnecessary gatherings and events. If you have family or friends who have one of these conditions, do not visit them if you feel sick.

### **After Travel**

If you traveled to China or Iran, you will be placed into a 14-day quarantine by public health. If you traveled to Italy, Japan and South Korea, you will be asked to voluntarily self-isolate for 14 days. For additional information about self-isolation, please visit: [Iowa Department of Public Health's Website](#).

As previously stated, there is no guidance from CDC regarding travel restrictions within the United States. If you think you, or your, child has been exposed to COVID-19 on a trip, please call your school nurse first before sending your child to school. The school nurse can help assess the situation and provide guidance regarding travel and COVID-19.

For frequently asked questions and answers regarding travel including: should I cancel my trip, is it safe to go on a cruise, risk of COVID-19 on an airplane and returning from a recently affected country, please visit: [CDC - Travel: Frequently Asked Questions and Answers](#)

We know COVID-19 is an emerging, rapidly evolving health situation. Information provided is up-to-date as of 3:00 PM March 13, 2020. Please visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)'s website for the most up-to-date travel information.

As a school district we will continue frequent communication with the Iowa Departments of Public Health and Education, and Winneshiek County Public Health, and then relay that information to our students, families, and staff.

Thanks for your support of Decorah Schools.

Mark M. Lane, Superintendent of Schools

**March 12, 2020**

Good Afternoon,

I am emailing to share an update regarding information that has been shared with Iowa public schools regarding COVID-19. Shortly after 3:00 pm today, Iowa superintendents received updated guidance from the Iowa Departments of Education and Public Health. I have included a link below to the guidance document, and encourage you to review the information. The document includes a number of links to excellent information. We will use this information to guide our decision-making, and our daily work.

**It is important to note that the Iowa Department of Public Health is not currently advising any school closures.** The Department of Public Health is leading the state in identification of key decision points needed to contain and mitigate COVID-19 and included in these decision points will be triggers and metrics on how they would recommend if school closures are necessary.

We are in frequent communication with the Iowa Departments of Public Health and Education, and Winneshiek County Public Health. We have been, and will continue to follow the guidance provided to us by these organizations in our daily operations.

The Iowa Department of Public Health has dedicated a page to COVID-19 and Schools. There are a number of excellent resources, such as a FAQ, and How to Talk To Children resource. I encourage you to use this page as a resource.

[COVID-19 and Schools](#)

[Here is a link to the newest guidance for schools regarding COVID-19.](#)

### **What You Can Do**

Review good hygiene with your family to help keep them safe. Examples of some routine, everyday preventive actions to lessen the spread of viruses include:

- If a student or staff member is sick, do not come to school.
- Cover your mouth with your upper arm or a tissue when coughing or sneezing
- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. Use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol if soap and water are not available.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.
- Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces.

We will continue to monitor the situation with county and state health officials. Should Iowa's status change, the district will turn to IDPH and the CDC and follow any updated guidelines.

Thank you for your support of Decorah Schools.

Mark M. Lane, Superintendent of Schools