



February 27, 2020

**To:** WPS Families and Employees

**From:** William S. McKersie, Ph.d, Superintendent

**RE:** COVID-19 (Coronavirus Disease 2019) – WPS Update 2.27.2020<sup>1</sup>

### **Background**

COVID-19 (Coronavirus Disease 2019) is a serious international health concern. It now has become a focus of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and State of Connecticut. Nationwide, there have been only 14 confirmed COVID-19 cases as of February 26, 2020.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, school districts are being asked to inform families and employees of precautionary steps to mitigate the spread of the disease.

Please read this memorandum as a “Be Prepared” moment. Please do not allow this memorandum to fuel rumors or fears. There have been no reported cases of COVID-19 in or near Weston.

### **Essential Points**

1. The frontline on disease prevention is each and every family—students and employees. The guidelines provided below will be most effective if adhered to by each and every family.
2. The basic healthy practices to prevent or mitigate influenza or other common illnesses are exactly what should be our first set of approaches with COVID-19. These practices are reviewed below.
3. We are monitoring the wellness of students and staff once they arrive at school. This is not individual screening at this time; rather, it is teachers and staff being extra alert to the wellness of students and their colleagues. As listed below, per CDC advisories, students and employees who evidence illness once in school will be asked to return home.
4. The administration is developing action plans if COVID-19 is medically confirmed within the WPS. These plans are being developed in coordination with guidelines and compliance requirements from the CDC, CT Department of Public Health, and Westport-Weston Health District. The essential aspects of the plans:

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<sup>1</sup> All items in italics are directly from Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) materials, available at the following website:

[https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/specific-groups/guidance-business-response.html?CDC\\_AA\\_refVal=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cdc.gov%2Fcoronavirus%2F2019-ncov%2Fguidance-business-response.html](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/specific-groups/guidance-business-response.html?CDC_AA_refVal=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cdc.gov%2Fcoronavirus%2F2019-ncov%2Fguidance-business-response.html)

<sup>2</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/cases-in-us.html>, February 26, 2020.

- a. The plans will include multiple steps to ensure student and employee health.
- b. We will notify all families and employees that COVID-19 is medically confirmed in the WPS and announce specific action steps. In all communications, we will protect the privacy of individual students, families and employees.
- c. If needed and required, we will close the district. This would be a last resort and would occur only if medical experts and authorities (i.e., CDC, CT Department of Public Health, and/or the Westport-Weston Health District) are requiring drastic action. The difficult truth is that it is not advisable to partially open the district (i.e., closing some buildings and operating others, with regroupings of grades, student and employees).

### **Stay Home When Sick**

- *Students or employees who have symptoms of acute respiratory illness are recommended to stay home and not come to work until they are free of fever (100.4° F [37.8° C] or greater using an oral thermometer), signs of a fever, and any other symptoms for at least 24 hours, without the use of fever-reducing or other symptom-altering medicines (e.g. cough suppressants). Students or employees should notify the school (or supervisor) and stay home if they are sick.*
- *The district maintains flexible policies that permit employees to stay home to care for a sick family member. Per the CDC, more employees may need to stay at home to care for sick children or other sick family members than is usual.*

### **Follow coughing & sneezing etiquette**

- *Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze.*
- *Put your used tissue in a waste basket.*
- *If you don't have a tissue, cough or sneeze into your elbow or upper sleeve, not your hands.*
- *Wash your hands with soap and water after coughing or sneezing.*

### **Ill Students or Employees at School**

- *The CDC recommends that students or employees who appear to have acute respiratory illness symptoms (i.e. cough, shortness of breath) upon arrival at school or become sick during the day should be separated from other students and employees and be sent home immediately.*

### **Travel Considerations**

As with other school organizations, we will be evaluating the health risks of students and employees participating in WPS-sponsored or coordinated international programs for the remainder of the school year. At this time, we have a WPS-sponsored trip to Spain late in the school year and a group of students and employees joining the Builders without Borders Program in Costa Rica in mid-Spring. We will be conferring with CDC travel advisories and other health experts as to the wisdom of travel. We will keep all student and employee participants informed as we conduct our reviews and make decisions.

More generally, we recommend that WPS families (of students and employees) follow these CDC guidelines:

- *Check the [CDC's Traveler's Health Notices](#) for the latest guidance and recommendations for each country to which you will travel. Specific travel information for travelers going to and returning from China, and information for aircrew, can be found at on the [CDC website](#).*
- *The CDC recommends checking for symptoms of [acute respiratory illness](#) before starting travel. If you are sick, notify the school (supervisor) and stay home.*
- *Ensure students or employees who become sick while traveling understand that they should notify the school (supervisor) and should promptly call a healthcare provider for advice if needed.*

### **WPS will perform routine environmental cleaning**

- *Per the CDC, the district will routinely clean all frequently touched surfaces in the workplace, such as workstations, countertops, and doorknobs. Per the CDC, we will use the cleaning agents that are usually used in these areas.*
- *No additional disinfection beyond routine cleaning is recommended at this time.*

### **Conclusion**

We will provide updates when necessary. Please base your understanding of any health issues in the district or individual schools solely on official statements from the superintendent or the principals. Please do not fall prey to rumors and false stories.

Thank you for doing all you can to adhere to the guidelines and practices listed here for preventing and, as necessary, mitigating illnesses. Following these well-known steps will help our school district and community keep on a healthy path.