

MSAD 08 - VINALHAVEN SCHOOL
School Response Update

TO: MSAD 08 Community

Date: March 15, 2020

From: Tonya Arnold, Superintendent

Dear Families,

Safety and health of our students and the community are most important. CDC and the Governor are still recommending to keep schools open. Yet information we are receiving from other sources indicate a potential benefit of school closings. Weighing challenges of school closing on families and hourly staff has been considered very seriously. The challenges we may face as a community if we do not take significant steps to minimize large student gatherings are speculative as this situation is unprecedented in our life-time.

We are monitoring notices closely and met this morning with local town and emergency officials. After that meeting, I participated in a DOE webinar and a meeting with mid-coast superintendents, a CDC representative, and a Knox county emergency representative. Information from various sources are not consistent. This makes our decisions very difficult. After long consideration we feel, that for the community of Vinalhaven, closing the school building to students and the general public for the next 5 days will give us time to explore and prepare supports that may be essential if a longer closing seems necessary. Here are some key points for you to be aware:

1. NO SCHOOL FOR STUDENTS Monday through Friday this week. (3/16-3/20)
2. The building is open to STAFF ONLY.
3. Beginning Monday all healthy staff are required to come to work at 8:00 am. Temperatures will be taken at the door. Those with fever will not be permitted.

We will use this time to make a plan for remote learning and to get learning materials or personal items back to students as soon as we work out logistics.

4. Teams will also brainstorm ways we might be able to support families beyond learning in case of long-term closure.

Closing the school will not have been worth the effort IF families choose to travel while school is closed or IF large groups of children and/or adults continue to gather. The immediate purpose is to slow the spread of illness, especially COVID19, to relieve the demands on our health care system by “flattening the curve” of new cases. While research is not yet certain, some evolving medical studies predict that carriers without symptoms could be shedding the virus in a way that may affect elderly and those with underlying conditions. Childcare needs and socialization of our students must be navigated in a way that reduces risk, but still allows our economy to carry on and be emotionally supported. Please think creatively with other families with whom you are connected to support one another. If you have ideas about ways school staff can help while students are at home, please let us know and we will see what is feasible given the latest updates at that point in time.

The town website will continue to post recommendations on size of gatherings, and other information on the topic. Please follow directions of your health care professionals should you become sick. Ask specific questions about what self-quarantine should look like for you or your family. My understanding is that recommendations vary depending on circumstances.

Please follow the Governor's recommendations –

- Cancel any non-essential large gatherings
- Cancel non-essential travel plans to other states and countries
- If you must travel, follow the self-quarantine recommendations for two weeks.

The Governor is still not at the point of declaring a state of emergency.

We do have cases of Flu B in our community, but this is not as concerning as COVID19. Because the symptoms are very similar, please contact your health care provider for guidance if you are sick and have traveled or been exposed to someone who traveled. We strongly urge you to also **be kind and caring to anyone who may be ill. The pandemic is no ones fault.**

Here are a couple of great articles about parenting through this time:

[Schools are Closing for Coronavirus, Now What How Working Parents Can Prepare for the Coronavirus](#)

Here are some ideas to keep your children busy and facilitate learning at home until we are able to provide more information:

Fun Learning Activities You can do At Home

<https://www.verywellfamily.com/fun-learning-activities-kids-at-home-3128960>

Read together

Make a budget together

Use fractions in cooking

Get outside – hike, make a fort or fairy house in the woods, walk the beach, ride bikes

In the past, families have sent their children to our playground unattended. This has not been recommended. In these times, adult supervision and limiting the number of people to small groups of healthy individuals is critical. Germs can likely live on the playground equipment for a couple of days depending on the weather. **Use of school fields and playground are at your own risk.**

I will plan to send an update by Thursday about our remote learning plans, and sooner if necessary.

Keep calm, and stay kind and clean.