March 13, 2020

Dear Union #73 and Ralph C. Mahar Communities,

We have been working over the past week to deal with the novel coronavirus, COVID-19, and its impact on our community and appreciate your patience as we continue to manage this rapidly changing situation.

The Town of Orange has declared a State of Emergency and has developed a preventative response plan resulting in closure of the town hall and libraries. Please see links below for more specifics.

[Town of Orange State of Emergency] [Town of Orange Preventative Response Plan]

As a result, and in partnership with the Orange Board of Health and Emergency Personnel (as part of a town-wide risk-mitigation strategy) **we have made the decision to close all schools, Orange Elementary (Dexter Park & Fisher Hill), Petersham Center & Ralph C. Mahar Regional for at least one week—starting Monday, March 16th, through Friday, March 20th—with the possibility to extend to two weeks through Friday, March 27th.**

This closure includes all sports practices and try-outs and other previously scheduled school activities.

**A status update will be distributed to families on, or before, Friday, March 20, 2020.**

Out of district special education students: If you’re out of district school is open, school will be in session for you as scheduled and transportation will be provided. Please look for notices from your specific school for up to date information.

*It is important for families, students and staff to practice social isolation, monitor symptoms, and avoid typical student events and large gatherings during this possible two week period. The intent is to isolate*
and therein calm the spread of the virus. If you do not assist us in this manner, we may be staying out of school for no effective result. This is town-wide public health strategy to reduce community illness, please take our requests seriously.

Food Support for Students: We have worked with food services to develop essential services for students experiencing food scarcity and food insecurity to have access to food stations (during this closure) that will comply with social isolation expectations but still allow kids to eat.

Grab and Go Lunches will be available for all children under the age of 18 in the town of Orange as well as all students enrolled in the Ralph C. Mahar Regional School. Lunches may be picked up at either Ralph C. Mahar or Fisher Hill Elementary School from 11am-noon each day. Watch for signage at each site.

Previously Scheduled Activities: While we know it is disappointing that activities are not occurring and key activities are postponed while community health is being prioritized, we are working to reschedule things wherever possible in the coming weeks. We understand that there will be questions about AP classes, MCAS, college application deadlines, prom and other special events but we cannot yet answer this at this time.

The MIAA (Massachusetts Interscholastic Athletic Association) has moved the start of spring sports to March 30, 2020.

School Employee Information
It is expected that all staff will check work email during this closure to remain informed. Any outreach to students and families, including activities and reading, that will keep kids immersed in learning, would be most appreciated.

During this closure, schools will be cleaned and disinfected using advanced disinfection equipment. Custodial staff will be asked to report to the schools to handle these activities. Food service staff will be providing meals for pick up.

Central Offices will be open on a limited basis.

Follow-up and Next Steps
This is an unprecedented public health situation that is rapidly changing. Our hope is that if we all work together, we can reduce the spread of this virus, protect our most vulnerable residents, and resume normal activities in a week or two.

A status update regarding school closures will be distributed to families on or before Friday, March 20, 2020.

We will keep you informed of any additional changes in operation as this rapidly evolving public health situation continues.

**Tari N. Thomas**
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Superintendent of Schools