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Washington Office of Superintendent of
PUBLIC INSTRUCTION
Chris Reykdal, Superintendent

k12.wa.us

February 26, 2020

Dear Superintendents:

As you know, many regions around the world are experiencing an expanding outbreak of respiratory illness caused by the novel coronavirus, known as COVID-19. This virus can spread from person-to-person and the number of cases detected in the United States and many other countries is growing.

Currently, the immediate risk to the general public in Washington and the United States is considered to be low. There is no evidence that COVID-19 is spreading in Washington at this time.

However, this is an emerging, rapidly evolving situation that may have significant implications for Washington communities, including schools, in the coming days or weeks. If you have not yet done so, I urge you to engage in contingency planning and to establish mechanisms for ongoing communication with staff, students, and families.

Here are some of the steps you should be taking now:

- **Ground yourself and your staff in the facts.** The best source of information right now is the [Washington State Department of Health \(DOH\) Novel Coronavirus webpage](#). There, you can find a novel coronavirus fact sheet available in 11 languages and a page dedicated to schools (which includes the PowerPoint slides from the 1-hour webinar DOH and OSPI jointly hosted on February 25). The site also includes workplace recommendations and links to Centers for Disease Control (CDC) resources and information. Both the DOH and CDC websites are updated regularly.
- **Establish an open line of communication with your [Local Health Jurisdiction \(LHJ\) leadership](#).** In response to COVID-19, Washington state has established a robust incident management structure, led by DOH, which includes ongoing communication with Washington's 35 LHJs. Any decisions to control the spread of COVID-19 in

Washington through “social distancing” measures such as cancelling public gatherings; closing businesses, schools, or childcare programs; etc.; will likely come through this decision-making structure. Now is the time to be working together in your community to prepare for these possibilities. As a reminder, you as the superintendent always have the authority to close your schools should the need arise, and state law also provides authority to local health officers to take measures, such as school closure, to control and prevent the spread of dangerous, contagious, or infectious diseases within their jurisdiction.

- **Routinely communicate with your school community**, including your contracted educational providers such as non-public agencies, about this evolving situation. Staff, students, and families should know where to go to find accurate, factual sources of information, and should know that you are monitoring the situation and are in ongoing communication with your local public health officials. A simple step such as posting a brief message to your district homepage with links to the DOH webpage and fact sheets will reduce anxiety in your community.
- **Intentionally and persistently combat stigma**. As new information emerges, please remind your community that the risk of COVID-19 is not at all connected to race, ethnicity, or nationality. Stigma will not help to fight the illness. Sharing accurate information during a time of heightened concern is one of the best things we can do to keep rumors and misinformation from spreading.
- **Engage in contingency planning** for the possibility of extended school closures should the situation in our state dramatically change in the coming weeks. Closures in other countries experiencing the COVID-19 disease outbreak are ranging from a few days to a few weeks. While some of you may be in a position to maintain educational continuity for some of your schools or programs using distance learning methods (ALE, online), I urge you to use an equity lens when making these plans. School districts must ensure equal access to education for **all** students. It will likely make more sense to cancel school and/or district services and make up missed days at the end of the school year, rather than deploying a distance learning model that can be accessed by some, but not all, of your students.

February 26, 2020

Page 3

As a reminder, a school or district-wide emergency closure resulting from efforts to control an infectious disease outbreak would likely meet the definition of an emergency closure due to an unforeseen natural event, which would allow OSPI to **waive school days** under [WAC 392-129—Emergency School Closure](#). Additional [information and guidance about emergency school closures is available on the OSPI website](#).

Finally, I want to assure you that OSPI's Continuity of Operations Plan includes provisions for ensuring **ongoing apportionment payments** in the event of emergency situations such as a widespread infectious disease outbreak. Likewise, your contingency planning should also include ensuring your payroll processes will continue in the event district operations are placed on hold.

My office will be following up this letter with an official agency bulletin within the next few days containing much of this information, along with additional details. Please don't hesitate to contact me with questions, concerns, or updates from your community.

Thank you for your continued partnership and leadership on this.

Sincerely,



Chris Reykdal
Superintendent of
Public Instruction