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*Superintendent*

*De Soto #73 Public School District*

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*Superintendent's Office*

*Ensuring learning, growth, and success for all.*

March 14, 2020

Dear De Soto Families,

I want to provide an update on the ever-changing situation regarding the Coronavirus (COVID-19). We at the district are using guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) to evaluate the best actions to promote safety within our district and community. We are in ongoing communication with the Jefferson County Health Department, area first responders, other county and St. Louis school districts, and community members in order to be proactive and ready to respond as the situation evolves.

The district has created a page on our website with information, resources, and previously sent communications regarding COVID-19. You can access this page at [bit.ly/2WjxOgq](https://bit.ly/2WjxOgq). In an effort to be cautious, we are cancelling all out-of-state students trips and in-state field trips.

In an update provided by the Jefferson County Health Department on March 12, 2020, Jefferson County is not monitoring anyone for COVID-19, and St. Louis County has one positive case. Currently, the Jefferson County Health Department and DESE are not recommending school closings. According to the CDC, modeling data does not show that short- and medium-term closures (approximately two to four weeks) are impactful in terms of slowing transmission. Other reasons the CDC provided for being very careful when considering school closures are:

- Most importantly, when schools are not in session, students are not receiving the high-quality instruction they get when they are in the classroom with their teachers.
- Social mixing may still occur outside of school with less ability to monitor, especially among older students.
- When schools are not in session, many of our students are unable to receive services they rely on regularly, including meals, physical and mental health, and special education services.
- Closure places increased burden on the community to find childcare, which could result in missed work for families (many of whom are first responders and health care providers).

If we must close our schools, we will do so in collaboration with the Jefferson County Health Department. It is important to review your family's plans for possible closures. There are several reasons we might need to close the district:

- Confirmed case(s) of disease directly connected with the district
- Student absenteeism - when it would not be prudent instructionally or economically to remain open

- Teacher/staff absenteeism - when the number of staff available to supervise and instruct students drops below what is necessary to maintain a safe learning environment
- To protect the public health and safety - when advised to close by state or local health authorities

Below are some questions you might be considering, including what might happen if we need to cancel school for an extended period of time:

- What if I keep my child home from school due to concerns about COVID-19?  
*Every family has unique needs surrounding student and family health. It is up to your family to keep your child home due to a health concern. Some children and staff may be at higher risk for severe illness because of underlying health conditions or a weakened immune system. Please continue to contact the building, as usual, if your student is ill.*
- What if someone in our family is presenting symptoms?  
*The Jefferson County Health Department (JCHD) strongly encourages that if you do not need immediate medical attention, to call your healthcare provider to assess your condition prior to visiting a medical facility to prevent unintended exposure to medical staff.*  
  
*The Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services (MO DHSS) has opened a statewide public hotline for individuals needing guidance regarding COVID-19. The hotline is operated by medical professionals and is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Missouri State COVID-19 Hotline 1-877-435-8411*
- How will De Soto #73 communicate with families about updates?  
*We utilize SchoolMessenger to deliver mass phone calls and emails. Please ensure your contact information is up-to-date in SIS--if you have updates, please call or email your school office. We also maintain a Facebook page (@DeSoto73Schools) and Twitter account (@DeSoto73). Regularly checking these communications tools will ensure you and your family are kept up to date with key information.*
- What guidelines should families follow regarding travel?  
*We know families have trips planned. Please consult <https://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel> before you travel for any travel advisories. Individuals who have traveled out of the area or who plan to travel should be mindful of their health and the health of others. We are requesting that families who have traveled to a high-risk area notify the building nurse of this travel.*

- What about students who rely on school for breakfast and lunch?  
*We will be establishing a meal distribution center, if needed. Specific directions for accessing these meals will be sent home upon the decision to close schools (using the communication methods outlined above).*
  
- Will you offer remote learning in the event of a school closure?  
*While we know that every instructional minute is crucial, at this time, we cannot ensure all students will have equal access to the learning and required materials, including technology and special education services. Remote learning is not an equitable option because:*
  - *De Soto #73 School District serves a diverse community with varied access to technology. We cannot ensure all students have access to digital devices and the internet at home.*
  - *Many of our families work. When schools are closed, we cannot ensure all students have an adult at home to support their learning.*
  - *We cannot provide all students with disabilities their federally-mandated free and appropriate education via distance learning.*
  - *We have not provided all of our principals and teachers the proper professional development needed to lead and execute remote learning.*
  
- What can I do at home to keep students prepared to come back and reduce information loss?
  - *READ! Reading with and to your students, as well as encouraging them to read independently, is always a good use of time.*
  - *Practice skills that require repetition (math facts, sight words, handwriting, cursive writing, vocabulary practice).*
  - *Utilize online resources, including both programs we provide students and free online tools.*
  - *Review class notes to keep material fresh.*

*(If the decision to close is made, more information will be sent with these suggestions, as well as links to these tools and suggestions.)*
  
- What will the role of the school district be if COVID-19 spreads quickly within our community?  
*District resources, facilities, and personnel will be available for the community if the need arises. We will be in contact with first responders and community organizations to determine and support community needs.*
  
- What can we do as families to help stop possible spread of COVID-19?
  - *Stay home if you are sick.*
  - *Do not gather outside of school. Social distancing only works if we actually distance ourselves.*

- *Continue to practice good hygiene, including washing hands frequently with soap and water for 20 seconds; avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth; cover your coughs and sneezes with a sleeve or tissue.*

Unknowns can be scary, but we want to reassure you we are being very proactive in our planning and will always keep the safety of students and staff at the heart of our decision-making. We appreciate all that you are doing to be prepared at home and encourage you to reach out to your building if you are in need of support or information.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "J. Isaacson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "J" and a long, sweeping underline.

Dr. Josh Isaacson,  
Superintendent of Schools