



Southbridge Public Schools

25 Cole Avenue, Southbridge MA 01550

Telephone: (508) 764-5414

Jeffrey A. Villar, Ph.D.
Receiver / Superintendent

Date: March 13, 2020

Dear Families,

In light of concerns about the coronavirus and Governor Baker's declaration of a state of emergency this week, I would like to reassure you that the district is prepared to respond to any risk or incident that may emerge in our area, in collaboration with the Board of Health and the Massachusetts Department of Public Health. The Southbridge Board of Health will decide if it is in the best interest of the community to send students home or to cancel school.

It is important to note that the declaration of a state of emergency in Massachusetts is intended to "facilitate and expedite the use of Commonwealth resources and deployment of federal and interstate resources to protect persons from the impact of the spread of Covid-19," as stated in the declaration itself. The declared state of emergency in Massachusetts does not indicate that all residents are at immediate risk of contracting the virus.

There is currently no known exposure to or cases of Covid-19 in our community. Preventative measures, such as washing your hands, remain the best line of defense for individuals and communities. If you are not able to wash your hands, use hand sanitizer. Cover any cough or sneeze with a tissue or your sleeve (not your hands), stay away from people who are sick, and stay home if you are sick.

The Buildings and Grounds Department of Southbridge Public Schools has a sufficient supply of cleaning supplies and a specific plan to clean and disinfect all school areas as needed. The bus company that we use, AA Transportation, has also taken new precautions in regard to cleaning and sanitizing surfaces to reduce the likelihood of spreading illness.

We are committed to providing all of our students with a high quality education. Closing schools for any amount of time could create significant hardship for families, including disruption to work schedules and missing out on other resources, such as in-school meals. As such, cancellations are a last resort solution.



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Decisions to cancel school are also subject to laws about the amount of instructional time needed to educate your child. The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education has provided specific guidance about cancellations in response to Covid-19 and the requirement of a 180-day school year. These guidelines include:

- Any cancellation between March 16 and June 1 must be made up to **ensure a 180-day school year, or until the district has reached its previously scheduled 185th day, whichever comes first.**
- Districts will not be expected to make up days lost to cancellations that occur after June 1.
- The longest that any school district will be required to stay open is its scheduled 185th day. No schools will be required to be in session after June 30.

This policy applies to the current school year only, in response to concerns about Covid-19. For Southbridge Public Schools, our “scheduled 185th day” intended to accommodate snow cancellations is Wednesday, June 24th.

We do not anticipate cancellations at this time. However, the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education has provided guidance to recommend that older community members and those at increased risk of illness should avoid larger school gatherings as a precautionary measure.

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The district website, www.SouthbridgePublic.org, now contains a page dedicated to information and any updates from the district about Covid-19. You can find this page by clicking on a notice on the website home page or through the “For Families” drop-down menu. This is where you will find the most updated information if circumstances change.

It is the policy of the Southbridge Public Schools pursuant to Federal and Massachusetts laws not to discriminate against individuals on the basis of race, color, sex, gender identity, religion, national origin, sexual orientation or disability, the administration of its educational programs, activities, or employment policies

Es la política de las Escuelas Públicas de Southbridge, de conformidad con las leyes Federales y de Massachusetts, no discriminar a los individuos por raza, color, sexo, identidad de género, religión, origen nacional, orientación sexual o discapacidad, la administración de sus programas educativos, actividades, o políticas de empleo.



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The virus spreads mainly from person to person, between people who are in close physical contact and through respiratory droplets from the sneeze or cough of an infected person. Close contact is considered within about six feet. It is possible that transmission can occur by touching a surface that has the virus on it and then touching your own mouth, nose, or eyes. However, this is not thought to be the main way that the virus spreads.

For more information on the coronavirus, please see the attached fact sheet from the Massachusetts Department of Public Health both [in English](#) and [in Spanish](#).

The State of Massachusetts also provides detailed information about the current outbreak of Covid-19, or the coronavirus on the Mass.gov website ([mass.gov](https://www.mass.gov))

You can also get updates and information about Covid-19 from the Centers for Disease Control website ([CDC.gov](https://www.cdc.gov)).

Additionally, links to the following resources for talking to your children about Covid-19 are available on our website:

- [How to talk to children about Covid-19](#)
- [How to talk to teens and tweens about Covid-19](#)
- [An expert-advised comic for kids that teaches about Covid-29](#)
- [Printable fact sheets about Covid-19 in general and how to talk to kids about Covid-19](#)

As always, the health and safety of our student and adult population is our highest priority. We will act promptly to make decisions in response to any changing conditions in consideration of information that emerges from State, Federal, and local agencies and any suspected transmission or exposure to Covid-19 that emerges in our community.

Regards,

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