

SCHOOL ADMINISTRATIVE UNIT THIRTY-NINE

Amherst, Mont Vernon, and Souhegan Cooperative School Districts

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASES

COVID-19 (Coronavirus) Update

AMHERST AND MONT VERNON – Thursday, March 12, 2020

Dear Parents & Community Members:

As our world addresses the global COVID-19 pandemic, it is time for our local school system to accelerate our planning efforts as is our responsibility to our students, our staff members, and our broader community. I remain confident in our community. We need to remain calm while vigilant, prepared while concerned, and proactive while thorough.

I believe there is a likelihood that we will be forced to consider a long-term school closure sometime this spring. I am hopeful our planning efforts will never need to be put into action, but prudent planning will allow us to ensure continuity of our educational services to our students even if our facilities need to be closed.

Earlier today, the State Board of Education passed an emergency rule change to ED 306.18 that allows schools to use remote learning as a means to deliver instruction to students.

A few weeks ago, I formed a task force that has been meeting twice weekly and communicating daily about our planning efforts. Our previous communications about this issue have been posted on our website here: <http://bit.ly/sau39covid19>. Here are additional plans we are putting into place:

1. Effective immediately, we are going to restrict outside access to our schools and limit large group gatherings involving the public in our schools. For example, the AMS play, the C-W math and science night and the MVVS PTA bingo night are all being postponed. As devastating as some of these changes are to our students who have worked for months on productions like the AMS play, it is the appropriate precaution to take. Each school will address future after school activities, athletics, and events on a case-by-case basis as they draw near.
2. Our faculty and staff need time for training and planning for a possible long-term school facility closure. As a result, school will be closed for students on Monday, March 16 to allow our faculty to receive technology training and to support time for training and preparation for our remote learning plans. We need to be proactive to ensure that if we have to close our schools, our students will have the support they need.
3. Facility staff have been provided additional training in effective cleaning and disinfecting procedures and are implementing those procedures within all of our school buildings on a daily basis.
4. We are procuring technology resources that will provide a consistent connection for our students during a potential closure. Our plan is to provide laptops to every student in grades 3-12 that can be used at home during a long-term closure. For grades K-2, we have a limited number of devices to send home if you do not have a personal device for your child to use during a long-term closure. If you need assistance securing reliable internet access, a device to use at home for your kindergarten through grade 2 student, or with access to food, please fill out this form: <http://bit.ly/sau39internetsurvey>.
5. In the event of a long-term closure, there will be several other considerations that we will address at that time. Some of those issues include our after-school childcare providers and their programs, students who receive services related to special education, special programs, attendance issues, free & reduced lunch provision, among many others.

6. If you are a student or a parent of a student with a specific concern about COVID-19 as it relates to your attendance at school, please contact your school's nurse to discuss your concerns. We will provide support to your student if you decide they need to remain home as a result of concerns around COVID-19.

Our job is to provide a safe, supportive learning environment for our students. Nothing comes before the safety of our staff and students. While my goal is to provide clear communication and a detailed plan, I understand that some of our actions will cause concern in our school community. I want to reassure our school community that we are simply taking proactive measures at this time to ensure our success if issues go beyond our control and force us to close school facilities. Again, while I am hopeful it will not be necessary, failing to plan for that possibility would be short-sighted.

I anticipate that over the next several months, we will have staff and students who need to remain home for various reasons related to COVID-19. We will need additional community members to serve as substitute teachers even if it is for a limited amount of time. If you are willing to be a temporary substitute for us, please visit <http://bit.ly/sau39subs>.

I remain in close contact with DHHS, the Department of Education, fellow school superintendents, as well as community leaders. I will continue to keep you informed as conditions change.

As always, if you have any specific concerns or input, please contact your child's principal or school nurse. I am always available at asteel@sprise.com. Future updates will be posted on our website, provided via Nixle, and on our SAU39 Facebook page. To sign-up for alerts via Nixle, text SAU39 to 888777.

Thank you for your patience, support, and dedication to our wonderful school community!

Adam Steel
Superintendent of Schools