

March 12, 2020

Dear Wynne Watts School Community,

Tonight we, and districts around our region, are sharing this message with our employees and communities.

Our city, our state, and much of the world are now dealing with an unprecedented public health crisis.

Since the COVID-19 coronavirus first emerged in Oregon, we have followed the guidance of our public health agency partners, including Multnomah County and the Oregon Health Authority, in making preventative changes in our schools and programs. As this situation continues to evolve, public health experts now believe the number of confirmed coronavirus cases in Portland and Oregon will grow. In addition, we are now experiencing a large number of staff absences, which makes it difficult to effectively operate the school system and causes us concern for our employees and their health. For all these reasons and to best protect our students, employees, and community, we believe it is time for us to act more urgently and more aggressively.

After careful consideration as a district leadership team, consultation with external partners and state agencies, and in addition to tonight's latest guidance from Gov. Brown, MESD will **extend spring break, beginning Monday, March 16 with a plan for students to return to schools on Wednesday, April 1** (staff will be expected to return on Monday, March 30, two days earlier). During this time, all school activities, including athletic events and practices, are cancelled. We will assess and confirm or adjust return dates for students and staff, respectively, on Wednesday, March 25.

Starting Monday, March 16, and until we reopen schools on April 1, schools will be closed to students. Education staff and school administrators are also expected to be out of MESD buildings until March 30. Custodial staff will continue to clean schools during the extended break, prioritizing high-touch surfaces in classrooms and common areas.

Schools are essential to communities. We know that extending spring break will cause difficulties for many families who rely on their schools for meals, health care, and a safe place to be during the day. Because of this, we do not take this decision lightly. But we have to be responsible not only as educators and caretakers, but as members of the larger community in which we live and work. Extending spring break is a preventative measure to help slow the rate of spread of coronavirus and, as public health agencies explain, flatten the curve of the virus's impact on our citizens and health care systems. We are also sensitive to the fact that many of our staff are older individuals with whom we share concern for their health and therefore want to limit exposure.

We are working on identifying ways to provide meals to students next week and will likely identify specific school sites to serve as hubs where meals may be distributed and picked-up. This information will be provided to parents within a few days.

I know this is a major announcement that in many ways is without local precedent. Given the seriousness of the current situation, we firmly believe that this decision is the best one we can make given all available information and keeping the best interests of our students, staff, and community at the center.

Again, we appreciate our fellow school district leaders and colleagues from around the state for their collaboration and thought-partnership during this critical situation.

During the break, we encourage everyone in our community to follow recommended practices by avoiding large gatherings, washing hands frequently, and covering mouths when coughing or sneezing. Those experiencing symptoms of the cold or flu should stay at home until symptom-free for 72 hours. If you are concerned about symptoms, please consult with a doctor.

We will continue to monitor this very dynamic public health situation and will plan to provide an update during the course of this extended break. Thank you for your support and cooperation during this time.

Sincerely,

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We Support All Students to Achieve Excellence

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