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# POCANTICO HILLS CENTRAL SCHOOL

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March 5, 2020

Dear Pocantico Families-

For your reference, the following link ([click here](#)) is of the PowerPoint, which was provided to all NYS superintendents, earlier this week in Albany. It is a comprehensive document which illustrates the most up-to-date compilation of data and associated action steps to date; and is inclusive of contributions from many state and federal sources.

I would encourage you to view the following link as it is a great, easily understood and succinct video explanation of the coronavirus: [Coronavirus\CoVid19 Video.mp4](#).

One of the largest aspects of combatting the coronavirus is the lack of established state and national protocols, among any agencies. During a conference that was held yesterday at the Ossining CSD (thank you, Ray Sanchez), superintendents from our region discussed the need with local DOH representatives for a strong and unified state response. I am happy to say that they responded, and I was able to participate in a phone conference with representatives from NYSED, NYSDOH, WCDOH and the governor's office. It was refreshing to have all parties in the same room providing information and answering our questions. I genuinely feel that they all care deeply for our students and communities and are working hard to help keep us safe. Among other things, they have pledged to keep us fully informed of any changes and updates, work to establish universal responses and protocols, and refine communication channels.

**If there is one message that was universally embraced, it is to remind our families to stay home if a family member/child is sick, contact your healthcare provider and practice proper hygiene.**

Utilizing this and other information, we have been working with all members of the educational community to help ensure that our understanding, preparedness and response to the coronavirus is as effective and appropriate. We discussed with our staff members this information, dispelled some local myths that were circulating, and brainstormed ways that we can ensure that our students are taken care of. Among other topics we talked about our enhanced cleaning procedures. Starting this Saturday, in addition to established protocols, our school will undergo an extensive and additional sanitizing regime. On March 12<sup>th</sup> our staff development day will be dedicated to establishing home based instructional methodologies to ensure that instruction continues if we are forced, for whatever reason to close campus for an extended period. Understanding that school is more than bookwork, we have opened lines of communication with other county agencies to help make sure that our kids and families receive the benefits which they deserve.

Thanks goes out to a local superintendent for creating the below question and answer guide. It has been refined to ensure its alignment with our practices and needs. Ultimately, our responses and actions will continue to evolve as our knowledge and understanding grows.

## Coronavirus Q and A:

**Question:** How do you determine “what to do”?

**Answer:** Our response to community health issues of this nature, is based upon the information at hand and guidance from the NYS/Westchester Department of Health, NYSED and the governor’s office. This is why we are working daily with these agencies to ensure that our information is timely and accurate.

**Question:** What are the cleaning approaches we are taking as a precautionary measure?

**Answer:** The District has very strong cleaning protocols. Our classrooms are disinfected nightly utilizing disinfectant sprays, electro static sprayers and good old elbow grease. Additionally, cleaning crews will now be performing an additional intensive clean of all classroom and bus surfaces on weekends.

**Question:** Has the District sponsored any travel outside of the US?

**Answer:** No, the Pocantico Hills Central School District has not authorized or sponsored any overseas travel as part of our educational program.

**Question:** What is our approach to working with individuals and families who have traveled outside of the US?

**Answer:** All families are encouraged to closely monitor the CDC for the most up-to-date travel advisories. Additionally, work with your family care providers if travel is essential. In this manner you can take proactive steps to help keep everyone safe. Districts cannot by law keep families from attending school because of travel. If you have travelled outside of the United States and have any concerns about the welfare of your family or others you should immediately contact your local health care provider. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions or concerns. As regulations and guidance change our response in this area may evolve as well.

**Question:** What should I do if I think my child may be sick?

**Answer:** If your child is experiencing any symptoms of respiratory illness such as a cough, sore throat, runny nose, body aches, chills, fever etc., **keep the child home** and contact your primary care physician. Should a child be absent from school due to an infectious illness, school work can be provided in an alternate format, as necessary. Don’t panic, we are all here to help.

**Question:** What plans have we made in preparation if there is a need to close schools?

**Answer:** In the event that we are forced to close school for an extended period of time we are actively working to ensure a continuation of instruction via a homebased model. This may include but is not limited to: electronic lesson distribution and submission, web or tech based instructional platforms, interactive communicative strategies, distributing “hard copy,” resources and creating alternate assignments.



**Question:** What happens if we have a confirmed case?

**Answer:** As required by law, the District will work directly with the NYS/Westchester County of Health and follow their directives and restrictions in order to best ensure the safety of our school community. All necessary steps will be taken to ensure everyone's well-being.

**Question:** How will this be communicated to me? In the event of any emergency you will be notified through the established lines of communication. Should it be necessary to relay individualistic information you will receive a call directly from the school.

**Question:** If my child attends a BOCES program or a private/parochial school, will district transportation continue if Pocantico closes or delays school but their program/school remains open?

**Answer:** The District has an on-going communication protocol with our partner schools, programs and service providers. In general, transportation does not occur when our district is not in session, but this will be addressed on a case by case basis depending on the situation. Please refer to the previously provided "Emergency Notification Fact Sheet."

**Question:** What does it mean when media reports speak about "contact" and "cases" with regards to the Coronavirus?

**Answer:** It is important to understand the differences as this is when "rumors" can circulate. Medical experts and the Departments of Health classify this in two important ways. A "case" of coronavirus is a confirmed case. It is a situation where the individual has been tested by medical staff and results of confirmation have been shared with the person and the County Department of Health. If there is a confirmed case and there is a potential for impact to the School District, we will be notified immediately.

A contact is a situation where a person may have had exposure to a case. That exposure includes direct exposure to coughing or sneezing by a case. Exposure outside of those parameters is looked at with a "risk mitigation lens" and can often be determined as low risk. In many cases contacts remain asymptomatic.

**Question:** What are the differences in treatment protocols for "contacts" and "cases"?

**Answer:** Isolation is the treatment protocols for cases. It is directed by the County Department of Health and requires the individual to be in a closed-door environment with access to an isolated bathroom and food. Isolation can take place in a home, a special location or a hospital depending on the individual's health.

Quarantine is officially decided by the County Department of Health. A person who has had contact with a case can be quarantined by the Department of Health. While quarantined the person/contact is checked for signs and symptoms. If the person/contact remains asymptomatic, those who have had "contact with a contact" such family members, neighbors, friends are not subject to quarantine. Contacts of Contacts are considered low risk.



**Question:** What about health care workers who have been exposed to a case or work in a facility where there is a case?

**Answer:** Medical facilities have very strict and stringent oversight and full protection protocols regarding this. They are working aggressively with the County and NYS Departments of Health. Medical staff/practitioners are continually monitored and wear PPE (personal protective equipment) gear. A medical facility may decide, out of an abundance of caution, to have a staff member self-monitor for a short period of time. However, if there is an official decision for quarantine or isolation made regarding a medical staff member and there is a potential impact to schools, we will be notified and at that point we will decide on our response.

**Question:** What is the official guidance regarding travel – both in and outside of the US?

**Answer:** There are CDC advisories regarding travel to places listed as levels 3 and 2. The CDC determinations are based upon the extent of the disease. The on-going transmission of the disease will inform decisions and designations as we move forward. The level isn't there yet for many destinations. However, NYS and CDC officials are constantly monitoring the situation, and this will change based upon new information.

**Question:** Why do some schools decide to close?

**Answer:** Absent an official directive to close by the County Department of Health, some school districts may decide to close for a day or two as a highly cautionary, pre-emptive measure in order to implement an aggressive cleaning protocol and/or gather more important information on a potential exposure.

**Question:** Is there an advisory for canceling large scale gatherings and events?

**Answer:** No, there is no statewide advisory in this regard. The superintendents are working closely in this regard so that our responses are as universal and appropriate. Determinations will be based upon the facts associated with each event.

**Question:** What about class trips and field trips?

**Answer:** We are monitoring this on a case by case basis and will make decisions based upon the most accurate data/information to keep everyone healthy. Generally speaking, at this time, we are not as worried about local events (school to school) as we are about traveling to larger areas where the risk of exposure is potentially greater. Before any school to school event we reach out directly to make sure everything is safe.

**Question:** What other concerns should we be aware of?

**Answer:** Misinformation and xenophobia. We need to all do our part to fact check and not spread misinformation, this only hurts our ability to address the true issues. Pocantico is a special place, our diversity is one of our many strengths; one that is embraced, not feared.

**Question:** What are the Smart Hygiene Practices?



**Answer:**

- **Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. Use alcohol-based hand sanitizer if soap and water are not available.**
- **Stay home when you are sick.**
- **Cough or sneeze into your sleeve or a tissue (not your hands), then throw the tissue in the trash.**
- **Avoid close contact with people who are sick.**
- **Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth.**

**Question:** What conversations should parents have with their children at home about the Coronavirus?

**Answer:** The following resources are helpful and informative.

<https://parenting.nytimes.com/childrens-health/coronavirus-kids-talk>

<https://www.npr.org/sections/goatsandsoda/2020/02/28/809580453/just-for-kids-a-comic-exploring-the-new-coronavirus>

**Question:** Where can I find additional information?

**Answer:** <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>

<https://www.health.ny.gov/diseases/communicable/coronavirus/>

[https://www.health.ny.gov/contact/contact\\_information/](https://www.health.ny.gov/contact/contact_information/)

<https://health.westchestergov.com/images/stories/CORNER/SchoolAdmCoronavirusFeb20.pdf>

<http://www.p12.nysed.gov/sss/documents/CoronavirusParentLetter2-5-20.pdf>

<https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/advice-for-public>

**NYS Department of Health Novel Coronavirus Hotline 1-888-364-3065**

If you have any questions, ideas or concerns please do not hesitate to reach out to me at 914-631-2440 ext. 702 or [rcalkins@pocanticohills.org](mailto:rcalkins@pocanticohills.org). Or stop by as my door is always open.

My best regards,

Rich

