From the Superintendent

Warning: This is a little longer than usual!

COVID-19 Extended School Closure

March is traditionally a really busy and fun filled month at school. March 2020 proved to be really busy but not quite as fun filled as we had planned! The COVID-19 situation came in very quickly and accelerated at an incredibly rapid pace. In early March, we started implementing more restrictive visitor protocols and increased cleaning and disinfecting routines. By March 12th we were restricting spectators from extracurricular events. By March 14th, we officially closed school for the remainder of the month, and into April.

Since Saturday, March 14th when the decision was made to close school, so very much has been accomplished. I rescheduled our superintendent's conference day planned for March 20th to Monday, March 16th. We used this day, and the next, to put an extended school closure plan in place, focusing on the following priorities: protecting the health and safety of our school and community; helping our families cope with the school closure by addressing basic needs such as providing meals to students who need it; implementing plans to encourage student learning for the duration of the closure. This was no easy task to say the least, but our entire staff worked with great purpose and truly outstanding commitment. Words can't begin to describe how grateful I am to each and every one of you for the work you've done over the past two weeks. Thank you!

Starting Wednesday, March 18th, we put our plan into action by restricting the number of employees in school, requiring social distancing for those who were in school, promoting social distancing for our students, providing meals to our families who expressed need, and implementing educational plans by providing printed materials to parents and/or arranging for online learning for all students in grades PK-12.

I am pleased to report that we are now delivering breakfast and lunch daily to over 80 students. Meals are provided to students at no cost to families and the school receives federal reimbursement based on the number of meals we serve. We are now required to restrict the number of employees at school more than originally planned and are operating on a daily basis using essential staff only.

Teachers began planning for the possibility of an extended school closure in early March but I don't think any of us predicted how soon and for how long we would actually make the decision to close school. Teachers continue to provide opportunities for students to engage in learning content. Printed materials are being exchanged each week during our Wednesday meal delivery, and many of our teachers are using online teaching-learning strategies such as: Google Classroom, Google Meet, Facebook Live, Class Dojo, email, etc. The extent to how much each teacher uses online teaching-learning strategies varies, as can be expected. Many of these tools are not necessary when our students are in our classroom each day so some of our teachers are working hard to expand their use of a variety of online teaching resources.

Notices for Upcoming Budget Development Workshops and Scheduled Board Meetings

The next scheduled Budget Development Workshop is Thursday, April 2nd starting at 6:00. Due to restrictions on public gatherings, this workshop will be held online, using either Google Meet or Cisco WebEx and guests will have the opportunity to call into the meeting. As is the case with traditional meetings conducted in the school library, members of the public are encouraged to participate in the workshop, but will need to access the meeting online. Specific directions on how to connect to the meeting remotely will be finalized early this week and posted to the school website prior to the workshop.

The April Board Meeting scheduled for Thursday, April 9th will be held online as well. Members of the public will be able to access the meeting online and specific directions will be posted on our school website prior to the meeting.

When We Get Back to Normal

While "only" two weeks into this shut down, to me it seems like it has been much longer. As I'm sure all of you are, I am hoping that we are able to get back to normal sooner rather than later. Unfortunately, we just don't yet know when this will be. Some of our planned activities are cancelled because they can't be rescheduled. Our Youth and Government students will have to wait until next March to participate in the next State Conference. Our elementary basketball season was cut short but there will be plenty of opportunities next year. Our baseball and softball teams were just getting started before the shut down and we're not sure when/if this year's season will resume. Fortunately for our athletes, we don't have any seniors on the team so, if we're not able to squeeze a season in this year, we will have next year to look forward to. I'd be remiss if I didn't acknowledge that, despite all of our best efforts, there will be learning opportunities that will have to be delayed to another time. Providing learning packets and conducting online learning is only a stop-gap measure and cannot begin to replace the experience of students in our classrooms. A number of other events, such as our annual St. Patrick's Day Dinner, our Irish Pride School Spirit Events, music festivals and many others have all been put on the back burner, at least for now. There's nothing to stop us from having an Irish Dinner at some other point in the year. After all we are the Fighting Irish!

Some Closing Thoughts

The media is flooded with stories of parents who have now found themselves in a position where they need to take a much more active role in their children's daily schooling. YouTube and other social media platforms are filled with both inspiring and entertaining videos from parents. I can only imagine how difficult and sometimes stressful this may be for some of our families. I've been in education the vast majority of my professional life but I still couldn't imagine having to do what is being asked of today's parents. Some of you may be embracing this new challenge, while others may be offering an extra nightly prayer for school to reopen soon. Personally, I wish that my three children, now adults, were still young enough to be home with me and my wife. I

don’t feel this same way during normal times, as I have grown fond of having a house void of between three and a dozen kids occupying my kitchen and living room, eating all the food, controlling the television, listening to music I have not yet grown to appreciate, and keeping me up later than I’d like. The silver lining for parents of school-aged children: you can control where your loved ones are and help protect them from this horrible virus. Parents, I hope that you are able to use every opportunity possible to enjoy this uniquely challenging time you have with your children. Please know that your child’s teachers and all of us at school are here to support you through this extended school closure. If any of your children are having an unusually difficult time with everything that’s going on, please let us know. We have a variety of counseling services available. As always, we very much appreciate your patience and understanding as we navigate these uncharted times together.

My wishes to all of you for a very Blessed and Happy Easter!