

MDIRSS Superintendent Update - 28 July 2020

Marc Edward Gousse, Ed.D., MDIRSS - AOS #91 Superintendent of Schools

Dear Parents and Families,

I am writing to update you on our progress with planning efforts in support of our safe return to schools. Our district admin team, including all principals/directors, continues to work tirelessly to draft recommendations in support of teaching/learning in the midst of COVID-19. Additionally, we continue to work collaboratively with community partners (JAX, MDI hospital, Downeast COVID-19 task force, and others), teacher representatives, building based teams and our safe return to school advisory task force to obtain feedback and identify recommendations, resources and supports in planning for the safe return to schools.

Last week, building principals released a parent survey district wide and we are currently reviewing this feedback. This afternoon, the MDIRSS staff survey is being released by principals and this data will also be included in consideration of any/all recommendations to the AOS board.

Unfortunately, misinformation on social media regarding the 2020-201 school year is leading to speculation, confusion and frustration. *To be clear, it is important everyone know that no final recommendations or decisions have been made and no decisions will be made by the administration without considering feedback and ultimately with school board approval.*

Consistent with our planning framework we have scheduled the following meetings for the MDIRSS AOS # 91 School Board.

- Thursday, August 6th - 5:30 pm AOS Board/Admin Team *(in person for board/admin) workshop @ MDIHS (Auditorium) - PPE and physical distancing required. Public access to this workshop will be provided via youtube link as we must remain under the 50 person limit at all times.*
- Monday, August 10th - 5:30 pm AOS Board Meeting *(in person) @ MDIHS (Auditorium) -PPE and physical distancing required. Public access to this workshop will be provided via youtube link as we must remain under the 50 person limit at all times.*

At the August 6th workshop the AOS board will receive draft recommendations publicly from administration in support of teaching/learning for the 2020-2021 academic year.

Please know we remain cognizant of the need for accurate information however, I believe we would be remiss if we did not honor and follow our process allowing the advisory task force to complete its work, consider any/all feedback from surveys, and ultimately provide the community, staff, administration and school board ample time to carefully review and consider any recommendations to be provided at the August 6 school board workshop. Following that, we believe the school board will be best positioned to consider any recommendations and take action as may be appropriate on Monday, August 10th at the AOS board meeting. *No determinations have been made by anyone and any assumptions to the contrary are false and without merit.*

In closing, I wish to underscore my highest priority remains committed to the health, safety and wellness of our students and staff as determined through the lens of data, and as determined by the potential course of COVID-19. Should you have any questions regarding this information please reach out to your building principal.

Thank you for your continued flexibility, patience, understanding, support and feedback as we collectively navigate this pandemic and in consideration of any potential recommended next steps. Please take care and stay safe!

MDIRSS Superintendent Update - 30 June 2020

Marc Edward Gousse, Ed.D., MDIRSS - AOS #91 Superintendent of Schools

Dear Students, Parents and Families,

I hope this email finds you safe and well.

I am emailing to update you regarding progress to date in support of the safe return to MDIRSS AOS # 91 schools in August. In addition to the efforts of the more than 30 individuals (*students, parents, community experts, staff, admin and board reps.*) actively involved in this advisory group work, we are also networking regionally with Hancock County superintendents, and others, in an effort to coordinate consistent guidance, plans and procedures in support of this timely and important work.

Although the summer break has arrived for many, our work progresses without interruption and we are well positioned to bring forward recommendations to the MDIRSS AOS # 91 AOS Board in early August. To date, since mid June, we have held two full advisory group meetings and several planning and sub committee meetings in support of this work. The decision as to how, and when, we consider reopening MDIRSS AOS # 91 member schools will be a local decision (*not by MDOE*); statutorily the ultimate responsibility for this decision rests with the Superintendent of Schools. That stated, my goal is to provide the MDIRSS AOS # 91 Board with recommendations and plans for the safe reopening of our schools and ultimately for the AOS Board to review and consider approval. In doing so our process will be grounded in the work of this advisory group, through its subcommittees, and ultimately through the establishment of school based advisory teams led by building principals.

The advisory group has been subdivided into working groups consisting of the following key areas:

- *Physical Health and Safety*
- *Social Emotional Supports,*
- *Academics*
- *Extra/Co-Curricular Activities*
- *Operations/Logistics*

Over the next few weeks the advisory group, and sub committees, will continue to meet regularly to review guidelines from CDC, MDOE and other entities, review updates/health and science data, review research, identify best practice(s), consider essential resources and recommend next steps in support of our safe return to schools. As you are aware, our timeline is narrow and I will continue to update you as information becomes available.

In support of this work, building principals will establish school based teams (*building admin, nurse, teacher, custodial, transportation, food service, counselor, support staff*) in preparation for safe return to school planning specific to each building - each principal will identify and establish a building based team in support of the safe return to school advisory group recommendations and supt./board approved plans. In doing so, we must anticipate multiple scenarios and options, remain open minded and flexible as we consider next steps. The capacity to implement these plans successfully will be through a building based platform using district approved plans and procedures consistently across all schools as a foundation for this work. Each building and staff will have the latitude to navigate nuances and identify supports consistent with the needs of students/staff and the availability of resources with continuity and consistency across all schools throughout our district.

For the continued safety of all, at this time our facilities remain closed to the general public until further notice and all staff are required to follow CDC, MDOE and district guidelines regarding social distancing, use of PPE when social distancing is not possible, hand washing protocols and/or the use of hand sanitizer when on the premises.

At present, we are reviewing health and safety guidelines specific to playgrounds, recreational areas (*i.e. MDIHS track - tennis courts*) and other external school facilities so as to be consistent with state, regional and municipal expectations for access and approved use of these areas. Please stay tuned for updates in this area to be released soon.

In closing, please know we appreciate the kindness, affirmation and support you have provided to our schools during these challenging times. I look forward to updating you soon. *Please take care and stay healthy and safe.* Thank you very much.

MDIRSS Superintendent Update - 15 May 2020

Marc Edward Gousse, Ed.D., MDIRSS - AOS #91 Superintendent of Schools

Good Afternoon,

I hope this message finds you well and enjoying the improving weather!

As we enter the final weeks of our 2019-2020 school year I wish to remind everyone of the availability of information on district and school websites, newsletters and communications from building principals. Additionally, we have resumed our scheduled school board meetings (remotely); this information is updated on our district website (mdirss.org) regularly.

I acknowledge the sacrifices everyone has made since March 13th and look forward to recognizing, and celebrating, our students in ways which we never considered just two short months ago. With that in mind, principals are actively working with students and staff to determine end of year activities and events of which details have already been, or will be released shortly by building principals. Although we understand the importance of traditional ceremonies and events, current public health guidelines will determine the parameters of how we may hold events remotely or in compliance with safety standards for all. Please contact your school's building principal for information on any/all school based end of year ceremonies or events.

With respect to summer programming, including use of any/all school facilities, all MDIRSS AOS # 91 schools will continue to operate remotely until further notice. Information on summer school, including special services, can be obtained directly from building principals or school staff.

As we approach the end of the year we appreciate the opportunity to dialogue with students, parents and teachers to gain feedback and report on learning through these past few months. We will utilize this information to affirm what is working well while considering areas our schools can improve upon should we need to continue with our remote learning platform beyond present time lines.

Students and parents will be provided with a learning summary letter to provide positive communication about evidence of growth and learning over the course of the second semester, including this time of remote learning. Our focus through this period has been on connections, engagement and maintaining skills. While we have all done our best with remote teaching and learning, clearly there are limitations to this platform and we are constantly working to improve upon our present model. Your feedback and support are integral to this process.

Our schools and staff feel strongly that there is a need for positive closure to the school year given the impact of remote learning. To that end, teachers will be facilitating meetings to discuss student experiences through this period, discuss what worked, how the student has grown, share observations and what may be improved. In doing so, we seek to provide an opportunity for end of year conversations to provide positive closure to the school year and reinforce meaningful connections to school. In many instances, teachers and families have had more contact this spring than is typical as parents have been key in supporting learning at home. Knowing what worked well and not so well will help us in planning forward.

End of year conversations for students and parents will be hosted and facilitated by K-4 classroom teachers and middle level advisors except where it makes sense for special education teachers, specialists, interventionists, counselors or others to host. Conversations will be remote through

platforms such as Google Meet or by phone and should last 15-20 minutes per student. Conversations will be scheduled within 30 minute windows to allow for pacing, technology glitches and related transitions. Students are welcome and encouraged to attend at the parent's discretion. Information on how to register for these conversations will be forthcoming through building principals. Please note: parents and students in grades 9-12 will also receive guidance on end of year conversations from MDIHS administration as well.

In closing, I wish to give a *shout out for our students!* - they have been amazing given our circumstance and we understand the loss they are experiencing as a result of this pandemic. Please remain strong, positive and know we are very proud of you as your generation continues to help positively define, and respond to, our new reality.

I look forward to providing you an update soon as information becomes available. Thank you, take care and stay safe.

MDIRSS Superintendent Update - 5 May 2020

Marc Edward Gousse, Ed.D., MDIRSS - AOS #91 Superintendent of Schools

Good Afternoon,

I am writing to update you on MDIRSS AOS # 91 end of school dates for 2019-2020.

Last evening the MDIRSS AOS # 91 School Board held a meeting and approved the following:

- 2019-2020 End date for students (K-11) Friday, June 05th, 2020
(note: MDIHS seniors, grade 12 will end on Friday, May 29th, 2020)

Our schools are actively planning and preparing for end of the year activities across our district and the release of information will follow soon. Should you have any questions specific to this information please contact your building principal. I look forward to updating you as information becomes available.

Thank you for your continued support of our students, staff and schools.

Please take care and stay safe!

MDIRSS Superintendent Update - 30 April 2020

Marc Edward Gousse, Ed.D., MDIRSS - AOS #91 Superintendent of Schools

Good Afternoon,

I hope this email finds you safe and well.

On Monday, May 04th, the MDIRSS AOS # 91 board will hold a meeting (*remotely*) to consider the Superintendent of Schools recommendations for end of the year dates for both students and staff for all district schools. *Please note : these dates have not yet been finalized and are subject to MDIRSS AOS # 91 school board approval.*

At present, MDIRSS school calendar end dates are scheduled for Friday, June 12th 2020 for students and the contractual end date for teachers is Tuesday, June 16th 2020 for the present academic year. Over the past few weeks I have been in communication with area superintendents, administrators, staff and school board chairs regarding potential ending dates for the present 2019-2020 school year. At the AOS meeting I will outline my recommendations to the board and my rationale for scheduled end dates for students. Without question, this has been an incredibly difficult time for our students, families and staff and we are committed to doing what is best for all.

Regarding potential summer programming and next fall - *we are collectively in a monitor status*. All MDIRSS member schools remain closed until further notice and no access to schools and grounds is granted without administrative pre-approval. It is important to note that Governor Mills' plan to "*reopen*" Maine businesses does *not* apply to public schools therefore no assumptions should be made at this time regarding when our schools may reopen. In short, plans to return to schools will be considered based upon scientific data and with regard to public health and safety.

With regard to remote learning, we acknowledge and understand that remote teaching and learning has been a significant strain on families. We also know and appreciate that everyone is doing the best they can. We want to extend a sincere thank you for how you have remain connected, and engaged, with school and are supporting your children during this time.

As you are aware, we will be engaged in remote learning for the remainder of the school year. When we first implemented remote learning many expected it would be short term (a few weeks). Principals, teachers and staff eager to continue to work together with families to ensure students stay engaged in learning. MDIRSS school and district administrators are currently working on end of year reporting and communication protocols. When these are finalized, we will share them with families.

Thank you for your continued support of our students and schools. I look forward to communicating with you soon. Please take care.

MDIRSS Superintendent Update - 10 April 2020

Marc Edward Gousse, Ed.D., MDIRSS - AOS #91 Superintendent of Schools

Dear Families and Friends,

This past Wednesday evening Governor Mills and Commissioner of Education Makin released a recommendation for all public schools statewide to continue to provide remote learning through the end of the 2019-2020 school year. Ultimately this announcement means that our students will likely not return to our school buildings for the remainder of this school year. Given this information, I will be recommending to the MDIRSS AOS # 91 school board that we continue remote learning for our students through the end of the present school year. To that end, it is important that students remain connected with their schools and teachers, and complete their remote learning assignments for the remainder of the year.

Unfortunately, given this announcement, MDIRSS AOS # 91 students, and those from school districts across the State, will be missing out on our Spring activities and many of the events and traditions we celebrate at this time of the year. I recognize this is very frustrating for our students and families, and our principals and staff are actively planning for alternative methods for recognizing and celebrating many of our traditional ceremonies and activities.

I wish to remind everyone we will be holding the upcoming April break (*week of April 20 - 24*) as scheduled. In order to support and assist students and families during the April vacation the food service program will be providing a bulk delivery to families and we have worked with community partners to provide enrichment activities during this brief period. *During the April break, MDIRSS students and families will have access to classes and activities offered through a virtual Family Arts, Culture and Nature Camp linked to the district website. There will be activities for K-4 and middle school students to do by themselves or with their family. All activities are offered free of charge. Although there are online components, there are also lots of offline suggestions. The schedule will be posted for sign ups on the district's MDIRSS.ORG website by the end of the day on Wednesday April 15th. Please note: some activities require pre-registration.* The MDIRSS virtual Family Arts, Culture and Nature Camp has been designed in collaboration with Camp Beech Cliff, SFOA, Artwaves and the MDIRSS arts, music, world language and PE teachers. There is no cost to students/families.

In closing, thank you all for the continued support and assistance you are providing for children and know, *you are not alone*. Together, we will get through this challenge by staying healthy in body, mind and spirit while remaining supportive of one another. Please enjoy your weekend - stay healthy and safe and look for an update early next week following the AOS school board meeting.

MDIRSS Superintendent Update - 7 April 2020

Marc Edward Gousse, Ed.D., MDIRSS - AOS #91 Superintendent of Schools

Dear Families and Friends,

I hope this email finds everyone doing well, staying healthy and safe.

I am writing to provide confirmation MDIRSS AOS # 91 district schools will hold April break (20-24) as scheduled per our approved school calendar. In doing so our school district is committed to maintaining resources to support food distribution for students and working with area community partners to provide student enrichment for this brief period. Details on these activities will be provided within the coming week. Maintaining this scheduled break will keep up aligned with all Hancock County public schools and provide continuity of scheduling and programs including HCTC among others.

Given our present closure status and projected date of return (*no earlier than May 04th at this time*), many people have asked when we will physically be able to return to school... that stated - I remain optimistic however, *the reality is we must all be prepared for a long term closure and the realistic possibility of completing the present 2019-2020 school year remotely.* I anticipate we will receive guidance and/or further direction from the Governor and Commissioner of Education within the next two weeks or sooner. Our foremost priority remains focused on the health and safety of our students and staff; please know we will continue to maintain the closure of all MDIRSS schools and offices until deemed safe for all to return.

Thank you for your continued support and flexibility during this difficult time. Remember, please take care of yourself and those around you. *Please stay home - save lives!*

MDIRSS Superintendent Update - 3 April 2020

Marc Edward Gousse, Ed.D., MDIRSS - AOS #91 Superintendent of Schools

Dear Students, Families and Friends,

I wish to start by thanking each of you for the patience and strong support you have displayed for our staff as we work to the best of our ability during such an uncertain time in our lives.

The flexibility and cooperation you have provided in our response to this health crisis is important and a key to the success of our work. Our teachers, nurses, counselors, support staff, partners and administrators have all risen to the occasion and provided a positive pathway to support for our students and I am very proud of their work. We appreciate, and want you to know how much they are valued, respected and needed.

Where do we go from here?

The next days and weeks will undoubtedly bring obstacles and more uncertainty to our lives. With that in mind, please know our foremost priority remains on health, safety and providing support and resources for essential needs. Our work in teaching and learning will continue however, we must collectively strive to continue to navigate any obstacles with open minds and hearts.

Given Governor Mills' "stay at home order" and directive to maintain closure of schools through Friday, May 01st, the MDIRSS AOS # 91 is amending the closure timeline to coincide with this date. All MDIRSS AOS # 91 will remain closed and utilize remote learning through Friday, May 01st 2020. Additionally, I will be providing an update on plans for the April break following consultation with MDIRSS AOS # 91 school board chairs early next week.

Although we remain optimistic, and will continue to plan for our imminent return to our schools, we must also remain cautious and mindful that our return date will ultimately be determined by the course of this virus. Our school district will continue to base recommendations, decisions and actions using scientific data, research and multiple, credible sources (CDC, MDOE, etc..) in vetting any considerations involving the safety and well being of our students, staff and communities.

In support of remote teaching and learning, please find the following information:

We value your partnership in ensuring our students are

- connected to school,
- engaged in learning, and
- able to maintain skills.

We know that students will benefit from engaging with academic materials daily in order to maintain skills. We aim to provide a balance of online and offline activities with built-in support, challenge and choice.

We also want students to have the opportunity to connect with teachers and classmates. We will use Google Meets to have virtual class meetings. Check teacher web pages for information on when these will take place. You will need student emails and passwords to help them log in. NOTE: Students should be dressed, in a quiet place and ready to "attend" class. Please set up a work space for your student.

Teachers will be reaching out to students and parents by email. Please check your email frequently and help your child(ren) to check theirs.

Some suggestions:

- We recognize the value of structures and routines. The proposed schedules are offered as a way to structure students' and families' time to include opportunities to engage in learning and frequent breaks. We recognize that not all students will be able to keep up the proposed schedule every day. Any effort to maintain skills is appreciated.
- Set goals: setting daily goals for what your child will accomplish can help to make tasks meaningful and build confidence for students. Customizing and then turning the proposed schedule into a checklist can help keep students focused.
- *Students do not need to complete all of the activities and we recognize that not every activity is appropriate for every child.* Teachers will make suggestions and directions. Encourage your child to choose something else if frustration level is high and let their teacher know. NOTE: We are **NOT** trying to replicate an exact school day. *Please modify the schedule as appropriate for your family.*
- Reading books, magazines, etc. offline/playing board games/making art offline are important ways to keep brains active and give eyes a rest from reading/working online. *Set up "no screen" times for your children.*

Please contact teachers if you have any questions. We are hoping that the transition to full remote learning goes smoothly but we appreciate your patience as we work out any issues that arise. Thank you for being champions for learning!

I wish to close by sharing how much I relish, and miss, personally seeing, and engaging our students and staff; we can all acknowledge the irony of how this unanticipated isolation has provided the unique opportunity to bring us together...

Thank you for your continued comments, feedback and support. Please take care my friends - Stay home - stay safe , be healthy, safe, assume good intent and remember, above all be kind and support those closest to you.

As a reminder, information and resources for food and remote learning may be found on our district website (mdirss.org) and on school pages as well. Please stay tuned for further updates and communications soon.

MDIRSS Superintendent Update - 31 March 2020

Marc Edward Gousse, Ed.D., MDIRSS - AOS #91 Superintendent of Schools

Good Tuesday Afternoon,

I hope this message finds you, your families and those closest to you healthy, safe and well.

As we enter another week adapting to our new reality, I wish thank you for the continued patience, and flexibility each of you have displayed in support of our staff providing resources for our students and communities.

In doing so, *Please know our number one priority and focus remains on the health, safety and well being of our students, staff and those within our communities.* We are working very hard to the best of our collective ability to ensure we maintain continuity throughout our district with respect to providing resources and support for remote learning. In addition to communications and guidelines provided previously, please find the following recommended practice to further support of community efforts to combat the spread of COVID-19:

- *Stay home* - avoid any/all unnecessary travel until further notice
- *Plan ahead* - *limit trips to only those essential and necessary needs (groceries, fuel, medicine)*
- *Do not visit or attempt to enter any school, building or office without administrative pre-approval until further notice -no exceptions please!*
- Continue to practice social distancing and follow established hygiene protocols (*wash hands frequently...*)
- When exercising or recreating - avoid congregating in groups or confined areas
- Remain cognizant of, and discourage, people from gathering in large groups or off site locations away from home (*playgrounds, parks, etc...*)

Clearly, this is a very challenging time for all as we weigh known risks while considering how to best move forward both now and in the foreseeable future. Remember, we are all in this together; we must remain strong, united and focused on taking care of each other. As school employees, we realize how very fortunate we are to receive the outstanding support displayed by our students, parents, families, school board and communities and remain comforted by the fact that in order to take care of others our staff know they are valued, appreciated and cared for as well.

This is an unprecedented time in our lives however, it is times like these that present opportunities to unite and do what is best for the common good of society. I am confident our nation will overcome this challenge and comforted by the fact that we will do this together - *one day a time*. Our new normal presents us with many hurdles - not all have to be tackled immediately... we must continue to take deep breaths, remember to step back - think and consider alternatives. In doing so, we must all recognize that "*many hands make work light...*"

In closing, I wish everyone to know we are conscious of, and sensitive to the need to celebrate success, honor traditions and keep the positive spirit alive in our young people, schools and communities. We appreciate the outreach, suggestions, advocacy and support for events to include: graduations, proms, class trips, promotional ceremonies, concerts, shows, exhibits, performances and athletics. These events, and many others, are very important and we will continue to network and to identify ways to celebrate and recognize our students while remaining focused on everyone's health

and safety. As Americans, we have faced many, many challenges in the past - we will overcome this challenge as well and come out of this stronger - *Never give up - ever!*

I am proud to serve our students and communities and will continue to keep each of you in my thoughts and hopes each and every day. Take care, stay healthy and safe and please look for future communications, updates and information.

MDIRSS Superintendent Update - 27 March 2020

Marc Edward Gousse, Ed.D., MDIRSS - AOS #91 Superintendent of Schools

Good Evening Families and Friends,

As we all settle into our new reality, I wish to acknowledge, and thank you for your patience and support of our staff as we work in the best interest of our students. Thank you for understanding and recognizing everyone is working hard to do the right things and make a positive difference. Our teachers, support staff and administrators have worked tirelessly to ensure we provide resources, remote teaching/learning and engagement to the best of our ability. Although there remain hurdles, we are pleased with initial feedback received and hope you will continue to reach out to our staff with any feedback and questions.

Should you experience any challenges with technology, please know we are checking all messages (*remotely*) daily. *As a reminder, all school buildings/offices are closed to any staff, students and visitors until further notice.*

Recognizing all our member school communities may be in different stages of preparedness given the unique situation we are in, I wish to note our school district is not comparing our efforts to neighboring districts or schools - *we will continue to move forward, and work collaboratively as a district to the best of our abilities with regard for the greater good of all of our students.*

In consideration of the future - *I am first, and foremost, an optimist and... also a realist-* I firmly believe we will overcome this challenge however, we cannot do it independently - *this virus knows no zip code, color, creed or social status - it spreads without prejudice.* Therefore, we must all be prepared for a long - term, sustained challenge - no doubt, there will be setbacks however, continue to look for positives, believe and know - *we will prevail!* This is a time for tremendous growth and an opportunity for communities and society as a whole to capitalize on our strengths and consider our blessings.

As we remain focused on our return, we are mindful of the activities, events and unique experiences that may potentially look different dependent upon how we balance health and safety with tradition. In the days and weeks to come our staff will continue to work hard to ensure student and parent voice is heard and that we do everything in our capacity to celebrate the success of our students.

Thank you for your continued support of our students, staff and schools. Please check our website (mdirss.org), newsletters , emails and look for continued updates from your building principal and teachers.

MDIRSS Superintendent Update - 24 March 2020

Marc Edward Gousse, Ed.D., MDIRSS - AOS #91 Superintendent of Schools

Good Evening Families and Friends,

I hope this communication finds you all well.

As of today, students/families should have received more learning activities and challenges from their homeroom teacher (*for K-4 students*) and content teachers (*for students in grades 5-12*) this week. We hope that students continue to send in pictures of their work and of completion of challenges. Our teachers and administrators are preparing for implementation of remote learning schedules starting tomorrow (*Wednesday*) at MDI High School and Monday (*March 30*) for grades K-8. We have been working behind the scenes to get teacher websites and google classrooms set up, to calibrate expectations, and to ensure learning bags and devices are out to students (*K-8*) with the goal that all families throughout our district have these by the end of this week.

We will share suggested schedules and learning expectations for K-8, including how to use technology devices to do remote learning, this coming Friday, March 27. Look for an email from your school explaining how we hope to continue to support student engagement with learning. In a few days you will also be able to connect to teachers' websites, assignments and materials right from your school's website.

Should you need any access to food or other services please refer to our website (mdirss.org) or contact your building principal. Thank you - please continue to stay safe and limit travel and visitations to essential needs only.

MDIRSS Superintendent Update - 22 March 2020

Marc Edward Gousse, Ed.D., MDIRSS - AOS #91 Superintendent of Schools

Dear MDIRSS Students, Families and Friends,

I hope this email finds each of you, and those closest to you, healthy and safe.

Based upon current information, including updates from CDC, and in consultation with MDIRSS AOS # 91 School Board Chairs, I am extending our present school closure from 27 March to 27 April 2020 - this decision impacts all MDIRSS AOS # 91 schools, facilities and offices. This extension will align us with many other Hancock County school districts as well as many school systems throughout our state.

Unfortunately, our new reality is filled with uncertainty in the near term however, there are many positives to highlight in our collective response to this challenge. Our staff, volunteers and communities have been nothing short of amazing - working day and night to secure, and mobilize, resources in support of addressing food insecurity, supplies, technology and materials for remote learning platforms. MDIRSS school administrators and several staff meet remotely multiple times daily to coordinate our district response, provide updates/feedback and align communications. Their support and efforts have been inspirational in battling this pandemic - *they are making a huge difference and setting a positive tone for all to follow.*

MDIRSS teachers and administrators are working hard to provide information about food resources, get devices and some learning materials out to students, ensure wifi access, connect with students/families, and plan for a more robust remote learning experience for students.

We are setting up teacher face pages on school websites so students and parents/guardians will have "*one stop shopping*" to get recommended assignments, links to virtual experiences, schedules and suggestions for outside activities. MDIHS Principal Matt Haney will be in touch with high school students/families to begin piloting a revised high school schedule starting midweek. K-8 teachers will be reaching out to students this week with content related resources, setting up school wide remote learning schedules and getting organized to begin facilitating on and offline learning.

Our goal for remote learning is to engage students through providing a collage of highly recommended resources and instructional support tailored to age and inclusive of a variety of content areas. We are exploring our options for replenishing supplies, recording live sessions so that students can watch them asynchronously if needed, and discussing how we can provide some direct/"*live*" instruction. The schedules we are putting in place are not replicas of the school day and will not mean endless hours in front of the screen, although more screen time than usual may be required. Please check your email regularly for information later this week with schedules and how to locate assignments. *If you are not receiving information or updates please contact your building principal.*

Thank you for your understanding, patience and continued support as we all settle in for what looks to be a longer period of remote learning. Please contact your building principal or director should you have any questions. Take care, stay safe, positive and healthy.

MDIRSS Superintendent Update - 19 March 2020

Marc Edward Gousse, Ed.D., MDIRSS - AOS #91 Superintendent of Schools

Dear Families and friends,

I am writing to provide you with an update on the MDIRSS AOS # 91 plans and progress regarding our district response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

As of 11:30 am today, 42 residents have tested positive for COVID-19, including a confirmed case in Hancock County. To date, 7,038 people have tested positive in all 50 states resulting in 97 deaths- *this number continues to rise*. Clearly, we must all remain focused on "*flattening the curve*" and committed to the following:

- *No staff, students or visitors are allowed in any MDIRSS AOS # 91 member school or facility without Superintendent and/or Principal authorization/pre-approval-no exceptions please*
- *We recommend limiting travel (anywhere) to essential needs -Stay home if you are ill or symptomatic*
- *Wash hands frequently with soap and water*
- *Cover coughs with your elbow or a tissue*
- *Practice social distancing (groups of less than 10 - at least 6 feet apart)*
- *Eat healthy, stay hydrated, exercise and take care of yourself*

As we continue to navigate this growing health crisis our focus must remain steadfast in protecting the health and public safety of all. Should you need to enter any building for any reason you are directed to contact your principal and await guidance and instructions.

Please know MDIRSS AOS # 91 staff are also working very hard to ensure that families have wifi access and technology devices that can be used to support teaching and learning as we move forward. During these two weeks we are focusing on connecting with families and on engaging students with learning by suggesting activities that students/families can do at home. Families should have heard from their child's homeroom teacher by email or phone and received ideas for online and offline learning activities. Middle and high school students will have heard from teachers and advisors. Once we have been able to distribute devices and learning materials, we are aiming to put in place opportunities for more robust remote learning platforms. Thank you for your patience, understanding and support while we work to create quality remote learning experiences. Within the domain of teaching and learning - remote meetings and plans will continue to be developed. Please await details and further guidance from your building principal in this arena.

Given this evolving situation it is important we all remain calm, engaged and informed. Continue to check emails and messages frequently and await further guidance and instructions on next steps as applicable. Should you have any questions please contact your building principal or school by phone.

Please look for communications to follow which will focus specifically on guidance, resources and support during this closure. These communications will include: support for food distribution and insecurity, remote learning and related resources. Please check our website (mdirss.org) for information and regular updates.

Without question, we are in the midst of unprecedented and extraordinary times - this requires flexibility, collaboration, patience and everyone understanding routines as we know them need to be followed yet

amended. It goes without saying, we all need to be prepared for an extended school closure; your support as parents and guardians is essential to the innovation and thinking outside of the box required by our staff in responding to this challenge- *I believe this can and will be our finest hour!*

Please take care, stay positive and know we will rebound from this challenge - *I am thinking of you and working to keep you all informed, updated and engaged.*

MDIRSS Superintendent Update - 16 March 2020

Marc Edward Gousse, Ed.D., MDIRSS - AOS #91 Superintendent of Schools

Dear Families and Friends,

I am writing to provide you an update on where we stand as a district and to provide short term guidance on next steps.

Today has been a very busy day as we have held a series of remote meetings with key personnel in support of both operational and remote learning resources. Through the practice of social distancing and video conferencing, we are working to coordinate resources and implement programming which can assist in providing services to our students, schools and communities. We are conscious staff are ready, and prepared, to help and are anxious to engage. With that present some challenges - *first and foremost, it is important we ensure we conduct thorough cleanings of our buildings, classrooms, spaces and buses*. In doing so we must establish, and follow, universal protocols to ensure individuals who may have been exposed to COVID-19 or may be experiencing symptoms do not enter our schools. This requires identifying consistent best practices and ensuring staff engaged in this process are healthy, safe and supported in this process. We are identifying these protocols and plan to initiate "*deep cleaning*" in all of our facilities within the next week as practical. ***In support of this expectation it is important that all parents, students, staff and visitors stay away from, and out of all school buildings - no exceptions.*** Should you need access to any school building for any reason, please contact your building principal and they will make arrangements to address your needs as practical.

Central office, including the business office and all school offices are closed until further notice and are operating remotely Given this national emergency, we ask that you be patient and recognize day to day, routine issues are not the present focus as we are devoting our full attention, time, resources and energy to responding to this pandemic. Should you have a *priority, time-sensitive* question for school office staff please email or phone your building principal or staff as all visitations in person are temporarily suspended.

We are working with staff, and community partners, to coordinate resources to support food insecurity, social/emotional supports and remote teaching and learning needs. Please look for regular updates and information to follow. Should you need resources and information regarding COVID-19 please refer to our district website : mdirss.org

Thank you for your flexibility, understanding and patience as we work to address the needs of our students and communities. Please stay tuned for further updates, information guidance and next steps.

MDIRSS Superintendent Update - 15 March 2020

Marc Edward Gousse, Ed.D., MDIRSS - AOS #91 Superintendent of Schools

Dear Families and Friends,

I hope this email finds each of you resting and spending time with loved ones. and those closest to you.

These are no doubt unprecedented, and uncertain, times however, with challenges we are presented with opportunities.

At this time many people are asking, *are we safe?, what can we do? how can we help?* These are difficult questions to answer with information changing so rapidly. With that in mind I respectfully offer the following guidance:

Are we safe?

- Our collective approach to safety, health and wellness is embedded in continued best practice(s); this will help to avoid spreading the COVID-19 virus. Safety is a responsibility we all shoulder and ultimately this comes down to doing the right things and following the advice of medical and health professionals. *Aside from avoiding assembling in large groups at schools please do so at home, in public or other locations*

What can we do?

- Stay home and take care of yourself, companions and loved ones
- Continue to regularly monitor MDIRSS AOS # 91 district communications
- Remain patient, flexible, rested and prepared to follow guidance as needed - *information will continue to follow as this situation evolves*
- Recognize day to day and school routine are on hold - clearly our daily schedules have changed - *we must all be prepared to consider alternatives to traditional routines as needed*
- *Take care of yourself!* Find time to take recreate, talk walks, get outside, breathe and enjoy the environment that is around us. Offer to assist neighbors, families and friends while being considerate of social distancing. Eat right, exercise, stay hydrated and engaged.

How can we help?

- Use this time to concentrate on your needs, those of your family and companions
- Await further guidance and instructions from school officials on we may support our students, families and communities remotely or in other innovative ways
- Exhibit empathy and provide assistance for those in our communities who are distressed or need support
- Communicate ideas, questions and/or needs directly to your building principal

As a result of the decision that all MDIRSS AOS # 91 member school buildings are closed, ***the MDIRSS AOS # 91 central office is also closed for visitors/staff until further notice.*** *Should you need any immediate assistance for urgent matters please phone or email the office but refrain from personal visits or appointments at this time.*

Thank you for your patience, flexibility, kindness and support - I am very proud to serve as your Superintendent. Stay tuned for updates soon- take care and be safe.