

# NORTHAMPTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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## SCHOOL COMMITTEE

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**John A. Provost, Ed.D.**  
Superintendent

**Camie Lamica, CPA**  
Business Administrator

March 13, 2020

Dear Caregivers:

This morning, I participated in a state-wide conference call with Massachusetts Department of Public Health Commissioner Dr. Monica Bharel, Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education Commissioner, Jeffery Riley, and Samantha Phillips, the Director of the Massachusetts Emergency Management Agency.

Commissioner Bharel shared that the number of COVID-19 cases in Massachusetts has reached 108 and is increasing in the state. Not all cases can be linked to international travel or isolated chains of transmission. There is evidence of isolated community spread of the virus. Because it is no longer possible to isolate the disease, her agency is focusing on mitigation strategies such as educating the public on hand hygiene, proper cough and sneeze technique, and the importance of staying home when sick.

Commissioner Riley emphasized the importance of combating bullying or harassment related to any protected group but called on us to be especially vigilant in interrupting hurtful behavior based upon race, ethnicity, or disability. He also shared that schools will be exempt from an anticipated executive order from Governor Baker limiting the size of public gatherings in Massachusetts. He explained that it may be possible for the state to obtain a waiver from federal accountability requirements but that he did not have the authority to waive the requirements for local district participation in the statewide accountability system (i.e. MCAS) because that is mandated by state law.

Commissioner Bharel advised against preemptively closing schools as means of preventing the spread of the virus. Instead, she gave specific advice for appropriate school closures once potential school contact with the virus had been confirmed. Commissioner Riley explained the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education did not request a statewide closure of schools. However, both commissioners emphasized that this is a rapidly changing situation, that their agency's

recommendations were subject to change, and that many decisions would need to be made at the local level.

As a followup to the conference call, I discussed these recommendations with our School Physician, Dr. Johanson. She offered her opinion that our capacity to make case-by-case decisions is constrained at this time by limited testing supplies in our area. The stock of test kits is expected to increase significantly in the near future. When we are able to more easily test individuals for potential exposure to the virus, we will be in a better position to follow the decision algorithms for school closure that have been developed by state and local health officials.

For this reason, I have decided to close the Northampton Public Schools to students from March 14 through March 28th. Students in grades 6-12 will be sent home with Chromebooks. Next week we will assemble age-appropriate learning materials for students in grades preK-5. I will be working with school staff next week to facilitate some continuity of instruction during the school shutdown.

Sincerely,

John A. Provost, Ed.D.

Superintendent of Schools