



LOUDOUN COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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For Immediate Release

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Superintendent's Remarks to Loudoun County Public Schools Community March 23, 2020

Good evening.

Tonight, I'd like to speak with you about how we as a community continue to respond to the challenges associated with COVID-19. With the Governor's action today to close our schools through the end of this school year, and with the number of COVID-19 cases rising locally, nationally, and globally, I want to speak with you about several important issues. Over the next ten minutes I'll share with you general information regarding the implications of the closure of our schools. I'll also talk about the concept of community care and how Loudoun County Public Schools is embracing this responsibility.

To begin, I'd like to speak with you from my heart about community care, and about coming together as a community. To me, the concept of community care encompasses the need for all of us to practice physical distancing, quarantine and isolation in accordance with guidance from health officials, while also coming together as a community and creating even more connections during a time of physical separation.

Social distancing is critically important, but the phrase seems counterintuitive to who we are as a people. We crave social interactions and connections. And so, perhaps we should refer to physical distancing, not social distancing. And let's focus on community care broadly, not just physical distancing.

It is natural to experience anxiety now. I feel anxiety as a father of two adult children, as a husband, as a son whose dad and mom are in their eighties, and as a Superintendent. And at the same time, I am inspired and energized by so many people providing community care. Specifically, I am inspired by the heroes within LCPS who are serving grab and go meals, translating messages, connecting with students through videos, and many more acts of community care. These individuals are Community Care Heroes. Their actions remind us that we each have a role to play in Loudoun's Community Care approach. I hope they inspire you, as they have me, and encourage you to adopt a community care approach as well. Everyone needs to do their part.

With the extended closure of schools, community care also means continuing to provide our students with learning opportunities. Our first step with what's been referred to nationally as "continuity of education" was to provide instructional resources that parents

can use to engage their students in learning, if they choose to. Our second step in terms of continuity of education was to announce that starting March 30 our teachers would begin engaging students in learning experiences, primarily using Google Classroom. Two of our initial statements about what education would look like starting March 30 were based directly on initial strongly-worded federal and state recommendations and guidelines. First, it was initially envisioned that all learning experiences presented by teachers would provide reinforcement of previously taught content, not teach new content and skills. Second, it was initially envisioned that teachers would give students feedback, but not grades, regarding student work through Google Classroom.

With better understanding of how long school closures will be, at a minimum, federal and state guidelines are pivoting. No longer are they suggesting that learning of new additional content and skills should be off the table. The Virginia Department of Education plans to set forth guidance to help divisions execute plans to continue instruction. It is my sense that the Virginia Department of Education wants to work toward ensuring that every student that was on track to graduate this year will still do so. And I think consideration is being given to how divisions might award credit to students who are not yet seniors, even in the very likely scenario that standards of learning (SOL) exams are cancelled this year.

The bottom line is that as of this moment we are continuing to plan what continuity of instruction looks like starting March 30 and that revisions may occur in mid-April or later. We know it is difficult that so much is unknown about the coming months, including as it relates to instruction. Here are highlights of what we do know for the period that will start March 30.

Most teachers of students in grades 3 through 12 will use Google Classroom to communicate information about both digital and non-digital learning experiences. K-2 teachers will use Google Classroom or other platforms they've already been using with their students and their families. At this time, all learning experiences presented by teachers will provide reinforcement of previously taught content. At this time, teachers will give students feedback, but not grades, regarding student work through Google Classroom.

As of March 30, and subject to change, we've asked elementary school teachers to provide daily learning opportunities of up to 60-90 minutes, depending on a student's grade level. And we've asked middle and high school teachers to provide daily learning opportunities of up to 30 minutes per class.

Opportunity gaps have existed for too long in the United States. We need to approach our work with an equity lens so that we maximize the growth of each and every one of our students, including students of color, students with disabilities, English learners, and students with limited or no access to technology. With this in mind, we are looking at how to make the learning opportunities during school closure accessible to all students, including those with disabilities, or provide equally effective alternative access. And we are working to close digital opportunity gaps. On March 10 we placed a mass order for

Chromebooks so we can try to complete our rollout of Chromebooks to every student in grades 3-12. We expect to have almost 11,400 additional Chromebooks on hand this week. And we rush-ordered 1,500 hotspots to address connectivity issues. Parents will start to receive information about the distribution of Chromebooks and hotspots very soon. And know that the delivery of technology will occur with adherence to physical distancing guidelines from public health officials.

Now I'd like to speak directly to high school seniors for a moment. As I think back to my own time as a student, and also as a parent and high school principal, I know it's hard to overstate how important senior year is. You have looked forward to this year with great anticipation, and so clearly this information can feel disheartening. I want you to know that I am committed to working with principals, teachers, and others so that we try our best for you as seniors to feel special. You have worked hard to get to your senior year, and we want to develop creative ways to recognize all of your accomplishments and help you celebrate with your family and peers.

I want to return to the idea of community care now, which must continue even as we work toward a new normal in instruction. Our most visible early act of community care was closing the schools as of Thursday, March 12, the day before the Governor declared a state-wide closure effective March 16. Though there were only two presumptive positive cases in Loudoun at the time, we could not have confidence that community transmission was NOT already occurring.

Community care includes caring for our most vulnerable neighbors, such as those with food insecurity or underlying medical conditions, and older residents. We moved swiftly in this area, launching grab and go meal service for students with food insecurity on just the second day of our school closure, and adding hundreds of other community pickup locations starting on the third day. As I worked with School Nutrition Workers and Bus Drivers on the first morning of meal delivery to community sites, their positive attitude, teamwork, and sense of purpose was truly amazing. And in the first eight days of our school closure, we've served approximately 75,000 meals and delivered 232 bags of nonperishable food provided by Loudoun Hunger Relief.

Taking care of our employees also is an important part of community care. We aspire to be an employer of choice and that aspiration must be reflected in how we treat employees daily AND in times of greater need. To that end, our payroll operations are not missing a beat. This Friday is our first payday since the school closure and, over 14,000 employees will be paid, almost exclusively through direct deposits. Full-time hourly and salaried employees continue to receive their regular pay. And, using funds already included in our budget for compensation, we swiftly created an income replacement program to pay part-time hourly employees, including substitutes, through April 10 with the possibility of extension.

In other measures, instead of specifying who is eligible for telework, we've closed all LCPS worksites for employees, aside from specifically approved exceptions. Employees

65 and older, regardless of title, continue to be paid but are not allowed to work at any LCPS worksite. We also are making accommodations for employees with underlying health conditions. These are the most direct means of protecting our employees by limiting physical interaction.

Another aspect of community care is strong collaboration across public, private, and not-for-profit entities. I am very grateful for the opportunity to collaborate extensively with the County Administrator and Director of Loudoun County Public Health. Mr. Hemstreet and Dr. Goodfriend, I appreciate your service during this time. And I want to thank the School Board, Board of Supervisors and other elected officials for their leadership.

Looking ahead, the Director of Loudoun County Public Health has stated that we have reached the stage of presumed community transmission and should anticipate additional positive cases to be reported in Loudoun County as testing increases. And today the Governor urged all Virginians to avoid non-essential travel outside the home, if and when possible. He also announced multiple directives relating to physical distancing.

I urge you to follow the Governor's directives and the recommendations of public health officials, recognizing that in doing so you are demonstrating community care. In the United States, we are proud of our emphasis on personal, individual responsibility. We show respect for our community by taking responsibility for ourselves and working hard. We have been proud of supporting our community. People like Frederick Douglass, Dorothea Dix, and Horace Mann asked, "What are we doing to care for our fellow citizens?" And so as we speak about physical distancing we are speaking of a civic act. Following the Governor's directives and the recommendations of public health officials are patriotic acts of community care.

Of course, please continue practicing preventive measures recommended by the CDC, such as maintaining at least six feet of separation between yourself and others, limiting your time around groups of more than ten people, covering your sneeze or cough, and frequent hand washing. And the LCHD advises that anyone who is ill should self-isolate and contact their physician for further guidance.

Please know that I care deeply about the health and well-being of students, staff members, their families, and the broader community. Let's come together as a community by practicing community care, including physical distancing and other preventative measures.

We know much uncertainty persists, and that it is tough to operate in an environment of ambiguity. We remain committed to providing ongoing updates based on the latest information available. We thank you for your patience and understanding during this time of uncertainty. I wish you and your family well in the days to come.