

March 14, 2020

An Open Letter To All Irion County ISD

Like all of you, I have followed the Coronavirus situation closely. I have been in communication with Local Health Officials (who receive their information from the Center for Disease Control), the Texas Education Agency, the University Interscholastic League, and other entities over the course of the past week in order to make the most informed decision I possibly can regarding a possible school closure. As you might imagine, different schools in the area and region have several different ideas and thoughts on the “right” answer. Unfortunately, there is not a “perfect” answer – and several options – none of which are ideal. As you might imagine, there are currently more questions than answers.

The Center for Disease Control and the Texas Education Agency have issued the following: “Unless a School District has a confirmed case of the Coronavirus in your area or region, schools should close for Presumptive and/or Preventive measures only. Decisions to close or remain open are up to each individual school district.” According to the CDC, as of this afternoon, there are 51 confirmed cases in 14 counties in Texas. Geographically, the closest confirmed case to Mertzton is in Fort Worth.

Having taken into account all available (and up-to-date) information, I have (tentatively) decided on the following, pending further updates from TEA, the CDC, and Local/Regional Authorities:

Monday, March 16th:	No Staff or Students Are To Report
Tuesday, March 17th:	No Staff or Students Are To Report 6:30 p.m. Special Called Board Meeting
Wednesday, March 18th:	Staff Only Will Report at 9:00 (No Students)
Thursday, March 19th:	All Students and Staff Resume Regular Schedule
Friday, March 20th:	All Students and Staff Resume Regular Schedule.

Hopefully, this plan will allow parents/guardians ample time to make arrangements for child care, transportation, and all other pertinent issues. As this is obviously a “changing daily” situation, it is quite possible that I will be updating or changing this plan according to updated information.

Over the course of Spring Break, our Maintenance, Custodial, and Transportation personnel have thoroughly sanitized and disinfected all classrooms, school facilities, and busses/school vehicles. We would ask that all students, staff, and visitors to school facilities abide by the recommendations of hand washing, coughing, etc., and to take all suggested precautionary measures if you suspect that you are ill. We also encourage you to please heed any self-isolation and/or quarantine steps, and to seek immediate medical attention if you are sick. This especially pertains to “high-risk” individuals (i.e. elderly and/or medically fragile).

In accordance with UIL guidelines, all extracurricular contests have been cancelled until the end of this month. Practices will be allowed only on days when school is in session. All field trips and/or school travel outside the District will be postponed until further notice.

Any student or staff person who has been out of the country, or exposed to a person or an area of concern is asked to stay home, and to contact the school before entering any school facility.

Again, this situation is ever-changing. We will attempt to provide updates via the school website, our phone call system, and DOJO.

As always, student and staff safety and well-being is of utmost importance to us. Every attempt will be made to continue to provide the very best educational opportunities for each child under our watch, and to do so in the safest manner possible. We sincerely appreciate your cooperation and support during this unprecedented time.

Please understand that, even though I have solicited and respect input from authorities, board members, administrators and staff, an ultimate decision of this nature is to be made solely by me as the Superintendent of Schools. If you have concerns, questions, or any comments, please direct them to me. My direct line at my desk is 325/835-6111, ext. 1512, and my cell number is 254/217-2216. My e-mail is rdespain@irion-isd.org.

Respectfully and Appreciatively,

Ray DeSpain, Ed.D., ICISD Superintendent