



THE LUTHERAN CHURCH—MISSOURI SYNOD

Minnesota South District

... cultivating leaders intentionally engaged in the mission of God

March 2, 2020

Dear Administrator,

Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand. Isaiah 41:10

Greetings in these days of the Lenten journey to the Cross. Over the last few weeks, we have been monitoring both the traditional cold and flu season as well as the new coronavirus (COVID-19). This new virus is of concern to many of our families and to us as well; Many are asking "what can we do to be prepared?" Therefore, we ask that you join in partnering to provide the safest and healthiest environment for students, families, faculty, and staff on your campuses. The very first step of preparation is prayer. We begin in prayer that the Lord of all will bring healing to those who are sick, comfort to those who mourn, and an end to the spread of this virus.

Recommendations:

1. Assuage parents' fears. The press is suggesting parents check for plans with their schools, so you will likely be asked. If you have not already done so, communicate with your school / center families. Attached is a sample letter you can modify for your own use to get you started.
2. Be informed on the subject. Some things you should read and know:
 - [Interim Guidance for Administrators of US Childcare Programs and K-12 Schools to Plan, Prepare, and Respond to Coronavirus Disease 2019 \(COVID-19\)](#)
 - [9 Things Educators Need to Know About Coronavirus](#) - Here are some big takeaways on the coronavirus for district and school leaders.
 - [Coronavirus and School Closures: What Are the Legal, Logistical Issues?](#) - Researchers and experts say states have authority to shut schools down if needed in case of a health emergency like a pandemic, but in the words of one, it's "not like turning a light switch on or off."
 - See President Woodford's letter to our Pastors' and congregations (attached) and Luther's letter on the plague (also attached).
3. Review with your staff common-sense disease prevention actions for students, families, and staff, including:
 - Enforce great hygiene, such as washing your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer. CDC offers several free handwashing resources that include [health promotion materials](#), information on [proper handwashing technique](#), and [tips for families to help children develop good handwashing habits](#).
 - Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.
 - Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue or your sleeve (not your hands) when coughing or sneezing.

- Ask all faculty, staff, and students who are feeling ill to stay home until they recover. CDC has workplace resources such as posters with messages for staff about [staying home when sick](#) and how to [avoid spreading germs at work](#).
 - If you have recently been to Wuhan, China, and feel sick, please stay home and avoid contact with others. Before going to a doctor's office or emergency room, call ahead and tell them about your recent travel and your symptoms.
4. Review, and if necessary update, your school / center's plans if it becomes known that there are local cases of COVID-19. The following is from the [Interim Guidance for Administrators of US Childcare Programs and K-12 Schools to Plan, Prepare, and Respond to Coronavirus Disease 2019 \(COVID-19\)](#).

If local health officials report that there are cases of COVID-19 in the community, schools may need to take additional steps in **response** to prevent spread in the school. **The first step for schools in this situation is to talk with local health officials.** The guidance provided here is based on current knowledge of COVID-19. As additional information becomes available about the virus, how it spreads, and how severe it is, this guidance may be updated. Administrators are encouraged to work closely with local health officials to determine a course of action for their childcare programs or schools.

Childcare and school administrators should work in close collaboration and coordination with local health officials to make dismissal and large event cancellation decisions. Schools are not expected to make decisions about dismissal or canceling events on their own. Schools can seek specific guidance from local health officials to determine if, when, and for how long to take these steps. Large event cancellations or school dismissals*** may be recommended for 14 days, or possibly longer if advised by local health officials. The nature of these actions (e.g., geographic scope, duration) may change as the local outbreak situation evolves.

If an ill student or staff member attended school prior to being confirmed as a COVID-19 case:

- **Local health officials may recommend temporary school dismissals if a student or staff member attended school prior to being confirmed as a COVID-19 case.** Local health officials' recommendations for the scope (e.g., a single school, a full district) and duration of school dismissals will be made on a case-by-case basis based on the most up-to-date information about COVID-19 and the specific cases in the impacted community.
 - **Schools should work with the local health department and other relevant leadership to communicate the possible COVID-19 exposure.** This communication to the school community should align with the communication plan in the school's emergency operations plan. In such a circumstance, it is critical to maintain confidentiality of the student or staff member as required by the Americans with Disabilities Act and the Family Education Rights and Privacy Act.
 - **If a student or staff member has been identified with COVID-19, school and program administrators should seek guidance from local health officials to determine when students and staff should return to schools and what additional steps are needed for the school community.** In addition, students and staff who are well but are taking care of or share a home with someone with a case of COVID-19 should follow instructions from local health officials to determine when to return to school.
5. Consider the implications of a long-term (14+ days) mandatory closure of your school / center.
- Could you continue to provide a continuity of education during a closure? If your school were ever closed for a long period of time for any reason, could you continue through eLearning? Here are some resources that may help you in developing plan:

- Concordia Shanghai has already had to deal with an unexpected long-term closure of their school due to COVID-19. Their experience in suddenly having to become an online school is being shared as an example by the ISTE Education Leaders Network: [a podcast from an international school in Shanghai](#).
- [If Coronavirus Gets Worse in the U.S., Online Learning Can Fill the Gaps](#) – Education Week
- [Preparing for the Flu: Department of Education Recommendations to Ensure the Continuity of Learning for Schools \(k-12\) during Extended Student Absence or School Dismissal](#) (an older document but still relevant)
- Technology does allow for students to stay home and still complete work online. The key, though, to successful e-learning is to prepare students and teachers prior to the emergency need. If you can run the kids through some online practice while they are at school, the implementation at home will go much better. Making online learning similar to what they do in their classroom is best practice. Getting your students used to going to a student management system to submit assignments online will help students to see that it's not a completely different experience.
- Review policies regarding tuition and fee collection if you are closed for a long period of time. Do you have an income source during closure? If not, what is your legal, ethical, and moral liability you owe your workers?

As a leader of your school, remember that you have been taught of the Great Shepherd's heart and are now asked to be His hand in gathering, watching, protecting, leading, and healing His flock. I pray that you may never need to implement any of your school's disaster contingency plans. However, if they you are ever called upon to lead your school through peril, may the grace that can only come from Jesus shine through you in that moment.

As always, we are here to support you and your ministry. If we can be of further assistance or if you have additional questions, please reach out to us.

God's richest blessings to you as you seek Him and honor Him on your campuses.

Whoever dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the LORD, "He is my refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust." Surely he will save you from the fowler's snare and from the deadly pestilence. Psalm 91:1-3

Peace in Jesus,



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