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TSD COVID-19 Update 3.8.20

Dear TSD Community,

As you can imagine the information regarding Coronavirus from all sides is a bit overwhelming and TSD is working to be cautious with our staff and students while reacting to the information coming to us. Last week we were part of a team of community agencies that gathered, and will continue to meet, as Coronavirus information is updated. We have added classroom and common space disinfecting on top of our daily cleaning of schools. We know and understand the concern every family has for their children and take our role in your family's school experience seriously. Over the weekend, I have fielded many questions and wanted to share some of them system-wide so parents understand the depth and complexity of the issues at hand. When we decide, we try to think through all of the implications and regardless of the magnitude, always keeping student safety high and risk as low as possible.

Here are some of the questions we are working through and where we are at with some of the issues:

“Will school close and what will happen to instruction, activities and field trips?”

Teachers were alerted last week to begin thinking about how they could take learning online. We do have a robust Learning Management System (LMS) in Schoology which could be our best platform for Intermediate through twelfth grade to continue student teacher interactions. In the younger grades we might need to have “pick up packets” that consist of materials for younger learners and appropriate activities that could be directed by parents or older siblings. As far as activities, CHSAA has communicated that they are still planning to host state basketball and with the start of spring sports we will have some time to better understand how the season will line up with Coronavirus and competition and travel to other schools.

It is unclear how the state will treat districts that close for extended time. We have a minimum number of hours and days we need to be in session. Right now, we would most likely have to make up days in June or lengthen our remaining days to hit the requirement.

Additionally, we may choose to close our buildings to outside events that might bring additional exposure to our campus. Our schools are the hub of many activities and festivals that utilize our space and campus. We will continue to monitor how these are affecting our system.

Two factors will determine if field trips occur. If we have drivers who get ill, we cannot send trips as we only have enough drivers to cover routes and one trip per day. Some venues may restrict our ability to access the intended activity and may restrict our travel as well. Varsity athletics will have priority if we get into a situation where we have to prioritize travel on busses.

“Who actually closes schools?”

Much like a snow day, it is my responsibility with input from the Board of Education to make the call. We are not medical experts and have a protocol that involves the San Miguel County Nurse, designated San Miguel

County Doctor and state agencies that have the ability to weigh in on our situation. If we close school, we will do our best to provide warning we are thinking about making that decision. We fully understand the impact on families, daycare, jobs, and business owners and take the decision seriously while looking at the safety of our families and community.

“What is being done to educate students about the risk and appropriate interaction at school?”

Students are aware of the cleaning going on around the facility. Staff and coaches are discussing cleanliness with activities and wipe down classrooms frequently. With that said, I have learned the term “social distancing” over the last week. Social distancing is being aware of your surroundings while interacting in your environment, replacing handshakes with elbow bumps, and washing my hands like I just peeled green chilis and am ready to change my contacts. I have also experienced students with an inadvertent sneeze being ridiculed and almost bullied, so it is a time of compassion as we work through this event.

If students are at school and show symptoms of respiratory illness, we are having them checked by our nurses and they may be sent home until they are better. With all students, it is a great time to discuss sharing things like snacks, drinks, water bottles and other behaviors that can transmit sickness. Last year schools saw a rise in mononucleosis, typically linked to students sharing cups, water bottles, etc. This was linked to vape devices and students sharing in social settings.

What about CMAS, SAT and AP Testing?

Right now, we are all systems go for the upcoming assessment windows. We continue to monitor guidance from all state agencies regarding schools, testing, and instruction. If we were to close and the rest of the state continued without us, I believe our community would understand our choice and the accreditation implications that followed. I believe the state would come up with an adjustment to the law that accommodates such events. We will do what is safe before we chase results for the bigger system.

There are multiple SAT tests going on this spring that are not required by the school or state. If your student is part of these tests for college, College Board is allowing each testing site to cancel if they are unable to provide a safe environment. We have yet to hear how AP tests might be adjusted, but with our two-week spring break we may have limited options for accommodating changes.

“How will staff and substitutes be covered if they get sick?”

We may see some of our staff have to leave work to deal with illness. We will do our best to maintain consistency of the learning environment. Our goal is to put qualified teachers in front of students every day. If we get too many staff sick, we may need to close until we are healthy and ready to teach students.

“How are you going to monitor families that travel over spring break?”

We can understand the concern of the community as families decide whether to execute their travel plans in the next month. As a school district, we are not able to tell families where and when to travel. I have heard from some parents they feel families should self-monitor upon return and assess if they are putting others at risk. This might be a great year to explore the desert or staycation.

TSD continues to strive to provide the best education for our students. Please know we make every decision with the information we have at the time and consider student safety as we work through the issues. We may have more information after our agency meeting on Tuesday for an additional update.

Wash your hands and wipe down!

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Mike Gass". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Mike" and last name "Gass" clearly distinguishable.

Mike Gass, Superintendent