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Important Message from Superintendent Taylor on COVID-19 School Closure

March 13, 2020

Dear South Orange & Maplewood School Family,

The School District of South Orange & Maplewood continues to monitor the emerging public health issue with COVID-19, also known as Coronavirus. The health, safety, and well-being of our students, staff, and community members continues to be our main priority.

I have been in contact with our local health officials, Department of Education officials, a network of superintendents, our board of education and others in order to arrive at the most responsible decisions and course of action for the students and families in our school district with respect to the Covid-19 pandemic. While there are currently no confirmed or suspected cases of Covid-19 in our District, recent guidance from the CDC, NIH, local health department, the NJ Department of Health as well as Governor Murphy's announcement yesterday to cancel all events statewide with more than 250 people, make it clear that the most prudent decision is for us to close our schools and transition to distance learning.

We recognize that this closure will be disruptive for families, and it is not something that any of us takes lightly, but we have a collective responsibility to preemptively address this public health challenge. **Therefore effective, Monday, March 16 thru March 27, 2020 we have made the decision to enact our SOMSD emergency closure plan and all District schools will be closed for a period of at least two-weeks.**

Please know that we take this decision very seriously and are being as thoughtful as possible to ensure equity and access in our preparation. It is our goal to provide support both academically and systemically, to the most vulnerable families in our community. We know that schools are not just buildings where learning takes place, for some, 'school' is a vital part of their food security and a virtual bridge to a generational opportunity.

Monday, March 16 and Tuesday, March 17, schools will be closed utilizing the District's unused calendar-embedded emergency school closure dates. These days will be utilized as we are traditionally governed by an inclement weather closure. The decision to transition to distance learning is a precautionary, proactive measure in an effort to minimize the potential risk of exposure to Covid-19.

Distance learning via home instruction for students will begin on Wednesday, March 18, 2020. Our educators are doing an outstanding job in preparing to implement our distance learning plan. All students from K-12 will be provided with access to Google Classroom to access two-weeks' worth of assignments from their teachers. Parents will be receiving letters in the mail that should arrive early next week providing important information on accessing your child's classroom portal. If you do not

have internet access and need a hard copy of your child's(ren's) assignments, please contact your child's teacher via email or contact our District office with your child's name, school, grade, and teacher name via:

- Email: info@somsd.k12.nj.us

All field trips, athletics, school-based activities/events, and ancillary programs are canceled effective March 13, 2020, until further notice. While schools are closed, there will be no-access permitted in our buildings, except to select personnel and approved visitors. By, Friday, March 27, 2020, a decision will be made regarding either the resumption of school and after-school activities (*for Mon., March 30*) or the continued closure of school. We will continue to evaluate this evolving situation and provide updates to the community via email, robocalls, our district website, and social media.

During our closure, for those families who qualify for the federal free or reduced lunch program or if your family is in need of food support, please contact the Parenting Center by calling: Karen Weiland, (973)762-5600, ext. 1850 or via email: kweiland@somsd.k12.nj.us and food delivery will be arranged for your family. In addition, starting on Wednesday, March 18, we will provide bagged lunches/breakfast during our closure for those families who qualify for the federal free or reduced lunch program (no one will be turned away). Additional communication regarding distribution centers and pick-up times will be provided shortly.

We are in uncharted territory and there will be many questions and challenges that arise in the coming weeks, and we will all work together to do everything we can to support our students and help them progress. We will be communicating additional information to families and students, including how to get help with technology-related matters, picking up of student's personal belongings (if applicable) and other details. This will not be perfect, but under the circumstances, we will stretch our resources and do our best to support our 7,200+ student body.

Thank you in advance for your cooperation and flexibility as we continue to educate our children while implementing best practices to keep everyone safe

Educationally yours,

Dr. Ronald G. Taylor
Superintendent of Schools