



March 11, 2020

Dear Harmony Community,

This letter is intended to bring you up to date on our understanding of the COVID-19 situation as it impacts Harmony and Salmon Creek Schools.

The public health response to the COVID-19 situation is evolving daily. We are now many weeks into the epidemic and some patterns and best practices are coming into view. The primary goals of the public health response include:

1. Minimizing the number of people infected.
2. Minimizing the severity of infections.
3. Ensuring services are available to treat patients with severe symptoms.

This last goal is central to the concern of public health officers and is why we are seeing such extensive and surprising responses in other countries. It is essential to **slow down** the rate of infection in the population. By slowing down the rate of new illnesses, hospitals can ensure they have capacity to treat more severe cases. If too many people contract the illness and develop severe symptoms **all at once**, the demand for health services can overwhelm local hospitals. It's far better for new infections to occur slower, allowing time for hospitals to treat patients who have adverse symptoms, help them to recover, and discharge them in time to make room for new patients.

As we have heard, health departments are placing strong emphasis on hygiene and sanitation to reduce communication of the illness. These protocols include:

1. Self-quarantining (staying away from others) if you are sick
2. Covering coughs/sneezes
3. Washing hands
4. Sanitizing surfaces
5. Not touching mouth, eyes or nose (mucus membranes)

However, these measures alone appear insufficient to adequately slow the infection rate in the community. Therefore, many communities have instituted "social distancing" practices as a key strategy to slow the spread of the illness. Social distancing limits contact between people through cancellation of public gatherings and closing down areas of congregation such as large businesses, schools, and places of worship. These actions reduce time that people spend in common spaces with each other and thereby greatly limits the spread of the virus.

Update on Current Conditions at Harmony Union

To date, no student or employee of Harmony Union School District has tested positive for COVID-19. Of course, testing availability has also been woefully limited. Nonetheless, we have been practicing good hygiene and sanitation and our excellent custodians and staff have been working hard to keep surfaces clean. Our nurse provided handwashing classes to students on proper washing technique. In addition, we have facilitated conversations with students to help them understand the current situation and reduce their anxiety, while inspiring them towards mindful practices.

The California Department of Education has instructed all school districts to keep students and staff, who meet certain criteria, away from schools, in order to better protect the health of our entire community from possible exposure to COVID-19. Until further notice, Harmony Union School District will exclude from school students and staff who have traveled, during the previous 14 days, to areas identified by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) as a Level 3 Travel Health Notice location. Additional exclusions may also be assigned as directed by the Public Health Department. We will continue to update the community on new developments.

Spring Break Guidance

As spring break approaches, we would like to remind families to please take all necessary precautions to protect yourselves and our community from this and any illness. Please note the following:

- If you travel to mainland China or any country with level 3 COVID-19 travel advisories during the upcoming spring break (including Iran, Italy, and South Korea), you will be subject to the above guidelines and any new guidelines that may be implemented. Visit the CDC website for a list of destinations with risk of community spread of Coronavirus.
- If you travel to any affected countries, we urge you to follow all related guidelines to support the health and safety of our community.

Emergency School Closure is Possible

Though Harmony has not been informed of a pending school closure at this time, given the trajectory of infections in California, and given the example of other countries deeper in the timeline of the epidemic, we anticipate that school closure may be instituted at some point in the future. We do not have a definitive forecast of when a closure may occur. If the Public Health Department notifies the school of the need to close, the school will comply.

Harmony Faculty and Staff have been working intensively on contingency planning in the event of an extended closure. Though we have some experience with emergency closure days for flooding and for fires, the duration of closure for social distancing appears much longer, perhaps as long as 14 calendar days. It is possible the duration could be extended or reduced by the Public Health Department.

Remote Classroom if Emergency Closure is Declared

Harmony's plan for an extended emergency closure will include Remote Classroom participation for students. The goal of Remote Classroom Participation is not to replace in-class instruction, but to provide a continuation of basic classroom engagement in the event of an emergency school closure. This program will assist students to stay in practice, continuing engagement with content, and supporting social emotional needs of students by providing a daily scholastic routine even during a school closure. Given that community emergencies may cause anxiety and stress in children, Harmony faculty feel it is important to provide an experience of normalcy and routine during a closure. Providing a Remote Classroom Experience will help meet this need.

In the event of a school closure, classroom teachers will provide lessons and activities for students to complete each day. This program will commence soon after school is closed. Faculty will use teleconferencing or video posts to provide a brief lesson or presentation and keep students and families informed of activities and updates. Information for accessing these resources will be provided shortly to be held at the ready in the event of a closure. Some activities are already underway in classes to prepare students for using these resources during a potential closure.

We are aware that some families may have limited access to internet or electronic devices at home. If this is the case for you and your child, we have additional resources that we can provide including Chromebooks and cellular hotspots that may be loaned to families. If you need assistance with landline internet access, or want to request a Chromebook or hotspot, please report your need to the office so that we may help identify a solution.

Food Service if Emergency Closure is Declared

Harmony will continue Food Service in a modified form in the event school is closed. Our food service staff is committed to providing nourishing meals for our children if at all possible. Meals will be distributed, with appropriate precaution, at an offsite location in Occidental. Further details will be announced upon a school closure declaration.

Special Services

Some special education services will be temporarily interrupted during an emergency closure. However, special education staff will continue to monitor student engagement with the Remote Classroom Program and will be available to respond to inquiries and requests for assistance from students and families in need. Upon resumption of normal school session, IEP teams can meet to consider if additional services are needed.

Reopening the School

Resumption of service would occur when the Public Health Department determines reopening school can commence. We will be providing regular updates, throughout the emergency, about the closure status and potential reopening. We are keenly aware of the impact a school closure has upon our community. This is likely why the Public Health Department has, until recently, avoided school closures. That said, it does seem likely that

school closures will occur in Sonoma County and it is best for our school and community to prepare for the possibility as best we can.

In Conclusion

If there is one take away from this ordeal, it is that our world is fully connected. We are a single species living on a small rock on the edge of a modest galaxy in an immense expanding universe. Though we may be separated by politics, language, and pineapple on pizza, we are connected by our common biology and our shared experience. We are lucky to live in an era when scientists and medical staff, all over the globe, are able to share data and conduct research across borders. This collaborative effort will help humanity as a whole, as we develop better strategies to manage epidemics, and develop more effective therapies and vaccines.

I would like to give a shout out to the incredible staff of Harmony Union, who have been stoic, compassionate, and creative throughout our response and planning. I am also grateful for the incredible support we have received from the Sonoma County Office of Education, who have been working overtime to support school districts during this crisis.

For now, Harmony will continue practicing good hygiene and sanitation. We will also continue our preparations for a possible school closure. If the Public Health Department declares that our schools must close, then we will institute the Remote Classroom Program and modify other services during the emergency. Administrative staff will continue to respond to inquiries during closure to provide assistance in any way we can. Updates during the closure will occur via text, email, and Zoom teleconferencing. Please be sure that the school has your latest contact information.

Our community's health is a collective effort. Thank you for your support.

Warm regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Matthew Morgan". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Matthew Morgan
Superintendent - Principal