



Ben Hill County School System

**Dr. J. Shawn Haralson
SUPERINTENDENT**

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March 12, 2020

Dear Parents, Guardians & Staff,

We want to make you aware that Ben Hill County Charter School System is closely monitoring reports and information regarding growing concerns about the spread of the Coronavirus, also known as COVID-19. Understandably, it is an issue for which we are all concerned and are following closely. As there are a lot of unknowns and information is constantly changing, we acknowledge it is too early to speculate on all the “what ifs.” Hopefully, this communication can make it clear as to what we do know and what families can do to help.

First, we acknowledge there is a lot we do not know currently. Information is moving quickly. Situations are constantly evolving. If a decision is made to change school operations, it would be done so in coordination with governmental agencies. We are unable to provide specifics of how we would operate schools in the event of a recommended closure due to many factors that could influence those decisions such as the condition of staff, resources at homes, and direction from appropriate agencies. We are also looking for guidance from governmental agencies such as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Governor Kemp’s Office, the Georgia Department of Public Health and the Georgia Department of Education.

Second, what we do know is that we have systems in place to respond to a closure and to mitigate our more immediate concern of flu. We are well-positioned with technology resources as a 1:1 school district, which could help us in the event of a closure. Platforms such as Schoology, online digital learning resources provided by the GaDOE webpage, paper copies provided to parents and students, and electronic communication between teachers and students could prove extremely valuable to continue educating students remotely if needed.

At this time, our schools are operating as normal and all school-sponsored trips will continue as planned. Understanding the unique nature of the current situation, we will honor parents’ decisions about their child’s participation in trips. Students will not be penalized for those decisions. We will continue to monitor information and make appropriate decisions on future school-sponsored trips. The flu, which has some similarity to the Coronavirus, remains an annual concern for our schools. Every flu season, our

teachers, school nurses and staff encourage frequent hand washing, covering every cough or sneeze, and cleaning classroom tables/surfaces frequently.

Custodial staff continually sanitize classrooms and common areas, soap dispensers are fully stocked, and our transportation staff is disinfecting buses daily. Finally, while schools have a role in this rapidly changing situation, we also look to our community to share in the responsibility to keep our children and community healthy. If families are traveling to affected areas, we ask they follow guidance given by local, state and federal officials as to recommended precautions before returning to school. Families with concerns about travel plans over spring break should maintain communication with their school principal. Based on current information, health officials are recommending local communities and schools take the same steps to protect against the Coronavirus that help prevent the spread of everyday illnesses like the common cold or flu:

- Stay home when sick.
- Wash hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds.
- If soap and water is not available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- Avoid touching eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.
- Cover the mouth and nose with the inside of the elbow when sneezing or coughing.
- Wash hands after coughing, sneezing, or blowing the nose.
- Disinfect frequently touched surfaces and objects such as toys and doorknobs.

If you have recently traveled to areas where there are ongoing outbreaks of COVID-19 and develop fever with cough and shortness of breath within 14 days of your travel, or if you have had contact with someone who is suspected to have COVID-19, stay home and call your health care provider or local health department right away. Be sure to call before going to a doctor's office, emergency room, or urgent care center and tell them about your recent travel and your symptoms.

We ask for your patience and understanding as we are all working with the best intentions and with the available information we have at this time. We will provide updates as necessary. Thank you for everything you do to support our schools.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "J. Shawn Haralson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first letters of the first and last names being capitalized and prominent.

J. Shawn Haralson, Superintendent