

Dear Hart District Families,

I am writing to you tonight to let you know that we have made the decision to restrict student trips involving airline travel for the next two weeks due to growing concerns about the Coronavirus. We fully understand the challenges resulting from this cancellation and we sincerely regret the disappointment that will result from this decision. We nevertheless believe it is a prudent and necessary precaution.

For the past several weeks our staff has been working diligently with local and state health officials and our elementary partners to understand how best to respond to this public health emergency. We have been directed to enhance cleaning routines, to plan for the possibility of school dismissals/closures, to prepare a plan to ensure continuity of learning if a school is closed, and to consider acting to mitigate the transmission of the virus through “social distancing” practices. While the Los Angeles County Office of Education and the Department of Public Health have not mandated cancellations and closures as of this date, their strong recommendation has been to begin preparing for these types of restrictions. They have instructed us to consider it a question of “when, not if.”

As of late last week, Los Angeles County public health officials were not recommending suspension of large public events or airplane travel. However, earlier today the Centers for Disease Control issued new guidelines that recommended that individuals with vulnerable health conditions avoid “non-essential travel such as long plane trips.”

<https://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/page/covid-19-cruise-ship>

Today we were alerted to a number of coronavirus related updates from the Washington D.C. area. For example, we learned that a group of students from a University in our area are self-isolating for 14 days after potential exposure while attending a conference in Washington D.C. We also learned that a large number of parishioners from a church in Georgetown have been asked to self-quarantine in case they have been in contact with a person known to be ill with the virus. It appears that a few D.C. schools have temporarily closed for deep cleaning.

Washington D.C. happens to be the location of the Student Television Network Conference that annually welcomes thousands of students from around the country – and across the globe. Dozens of our Hart District students were poised to depart for the conference in the next several days, causing us to think carefully about the advisability of sending our students across the country to a high-density conference during this fluid situation. The conference promoters themselves acknowledged this concern in their letter to STN members:

“We understand that some parents may wish to keep their children home and we support that decision. Many of us have made that decision ourselves in the past despite the financial or personal consequences. We know that, despite our

efforts, attending the convention may increase your exposure to the virus and that you are voluntarily assuming that risk”

https://www.studenttelevision.com/data/images/2020_CONVENTION/STN_2020_CONVENTION_UPDATE.pdf

Voluntarily assuming risk is a decision we might normally defer to each family to make for themselves. However, given the nature of this virus and the concerns we have about the danger of transmission to vulnerable groups, (such as the elderly and those with compromised immune systems) we felt the need to consider the good of the larger community. We also weighed concerns over the possibility of students being quarantined in locations far from their families and away from their support networks.

For all of these reasons we decided to act by temporarily restricting all Hart District sponsored airplane travel for student trips for a period of two weeks while we await additional guidelines from public health officials. We do recognize the financial implications of making this decision. We are working diligently to secure refunds, vouchers and credits for the families impacted by this decision. We will continue to monitor the advice of public health professionals and will revise this policy as needed on a regular basis.

I've spent the afternoon speaking with frustrated parents and meeting with disappointed students. I was especially impressed with a group of West Ranch High School students who took it upon themselves to meet with me to powerfully advocate for their position. Their passion and eloquence helped me to understand just how painful this decision is for so many students. I'm sure they speak for many others who may have to endure similar disappointments. However, I appreciate the respectful way that they listened and understood the reasoning behind the District's decision to err on the side of precaution.

As Superintendent, I recognize and accept that it is my responsibility to communicate in a transparent and timely fashion. The rapidly changing nature of this situation prevented me from communicating in a manner that would normally have involved input and feedback from all interested parties. Be assured that I intend that to be the exception and not the rule.

Thank you for your patience and understanding.

Sincerely,

Mike Kuhlman

Superintendent

William S. Hart Union High School District