

Dear Ballard Families,

Forgive the length of this update. There is a lot to cover.

The Board of Education met in a special meeting last night. It's hard to believe it's been less than 48 hours since the announcement was made to close school for a month. There is clearly a desire to act as quickly as possible on a number of matters to answer questions and relieve anxiety.

Payroll

The Board took action to ensure all employees would be paid during the closure, whether they are able to work or not. This is a unique situation and we want to ensure our employees are taken care of and in a position to support our students and community during the closure. Also, it is our responsibility to try and maintain our high quality staff so we are ready to resume school when the time comes.

School Closure

The Board formally resolved to follow the current and future recommendations of the Governor regarding closure of schools.

Beyond the above formal actions, I shared a number of updates with the Board and sought input. The following are the discussion points in no order of importance.

Meals

We are planning to provide grab-and-go breakfast and lunch to any children age 0-18 in our district. The menu will be a limited "emergency" menu which will vary somewhat day to day. This requires approval from the state which we are working to gain. We are preparing to begin as soon as we are granted approval. For those interested, look for a survey by mid-week. Flyers will be posted and parents can also call 515.597.2811 to sign up. Due to federal requirements, children must be present to receive meals whether it's drop-off or delivery.

Building Access

Once staff returns from break and they have an opportunity to get what they need from their classrooms, our buildings will be locked down and not accessible to anyone except principals, custodians, and a few other essential personnel. I have designated principals to initially grant limited access in a controlled manner and only for critical reasons. Students have likely left items in lockers. I ask that you only make a request of a principal if it is of high importance, like getting medication. Keep in mind, students and parents will not be permitted in the buildings. The principal will have to secure the item and meet individuals at the door. They will not be working in the buildings, so this will require a special trip. This may seem drastic. It is a result of a commitment to the recommendation of Governor Reynolds to limit community travel and interaction to necessities.

Two exceptions to this are the need for limited staff to prepare meals for our students and maintaining limited district office hours for phone calls only. Public drop-ins from anyone, including staff will not be permitted unless authorized.

Education

We will continue to work closely with the state to understand what we can and cannot do with our students during closure. This includes online interaction, providing resources and activities, and DMACC/ISU courses. The issue is equity and whether whatever is done can be accessed by all students. I assure you, we will do as much as we can to stay connected and will look at what others are doing, as long as it is legal.

Mental Health Services

Lifeworks will continue to provide therapy online to our students receiving services.

Childcare

We are committed to working with state officials in an effort to ensure individuals critical to our statewide efforts are provided childcare so they are not forced to choose between taking care of their children and performing their necessary functions. These critical jobs include, but are not limited to: first responders, medical and health professionals, grocery and pharmacy staff, and supply chain staff.

To support this effort, we will begin with a survey to all households to determine who works in these roles. Surveys do not always yield results. Following that, we follow-up with phone calls and emails until we are confident we have an accurate list.

Finally, I invite anyone with a question or concern to call or email me. We have a number of staff gone for break, but I will do my best to respond to everyone. If you are worried, we want to help. Take care of yourself, take care of your neighbor, and stay connected!

Ottie Maxey, Ballard Superintendent
Ballard Board of Education