

Hello fellow Alaskans and members of the Anchorage community. I am Dr. Deena Bishop, superintendent of the Anchorage School District. Today I would like to talk to you about Covid-19 and its impact within our community, state, country and world.

First, I want to extend my gratitude to those on the front lines – our emergency personnel and everyone working in public health. These are challenging times. Covid-19 is a new virus and the world is scrambling to gather information and monitor its spread.

I listened to a video clip from a doctor in the field of infectious diseases, Dr. Emily Landon. She acknowledges the confusion many of us feel with schools closed, restaurants shuttered or moving to take-out only, services temporarily put on hold, and a sense of loss of many liberties we hold valuable.

Most medical professionals agree that 80% or more of those testing positive for Covid-19 will recover in a week or two; however, 20% of patients – the older, those who have compromised immune systems or other medical problems – are going to need more support (hospitalization, oxygen, a ventilator, and/or life support). Our hospitals just don't have any slack in their resources—they need all of us to do our share in helping with this virus.

Specifically, the need for social distancing to flatten the curve and stop the spread of Covid-19. I agree – this is

something we as a community need to do and I want you to know that I join you in doing my part.

Personally, I have mastered the details of effective handwashing; I carry sanitizing wipes and hand sanitizer. I shelter in place as much as possible and practice social distancing when I am away from home. I have had a daughter return to Alaska after her college shut its doors for the semester. As a level two risk, we practice social distancing in the home, and I take my temperature twice a day.

Professionally, as the superintendent of Anchorage School District, I have made several decisions to keep the health of our city at the forefront. Among those decisions, I have asked all schools and employees to do their part by teleworking and remaining in “hunker down” status.

I understand that information changes daily and our goal is to keep our families updated on latest protocols/plans which may vary as we operate within changed variables. Know that updated information can always be found on the ASD website under Hot Topics.

ASD is not planning to universally extend the school year currently, rather we are working very hard to ensure this year counts for our students. As such this past week was devoted to a needs assessment of students as well as to organize for our employees to work from home as much as possible.

Some of our jobs cannot utilize the telework system, and we desire to keep our food service personnel and bus drivers engaged and healthy supporting the needs of students. Our custodians continue to keep our schools sanitized. Our technologists who are standing up our online system and initializing our computers for home use are working diligently around the clock. For them to stay healthy, we need all others to remain at home. We learned today that an ASD employee tested positive for COVID-19. Again, for our work to continue, the health of employees is paramount.

Thank you for your patience as we work through the details of getting instruction online. This week, your teachers will reach out to you with more information. Please do not spend time stressing about academics. Our entire nation is in this together. Our teachers are experts and your kids will persevere. Our goal is to keep learning moving forward, but not create anxiety in our students, staff, or families. Now is the time to work together, give grace when needed, and love up on our students. These are unprecedented times.

As a review of the letter sent last week, current plans for pre-K – grade 6 include districtwide core instructional modules created for all teachers, with supplemental activities designed by individual teachers. We will offer elementary support materials in both electronic versions and paper/pencil packets. Times and locations for pickup

of paper/pencil packets will be announced, so please stay tuned for those details.

Current plans for middle school students in grades 6-8 include a combination of online coursework and supplemental teacher-created activities using two online platforms: Canvas and APEX. While English Language Arts and Math will be a priority, other elective supplemental activities will also be offered.

In high school, students are moving to independence and preparing for success in life. Therefore, our initial course offerings focus primarily on courses that are required for graduation. Priority will be given to seniors so as not to disrupt their post-high school plans. Other electives will be offered as we are able to build those units in the Canvas platform. We plan to offer extended time during the summer for students needing credits to graduate. We understand seniors are preparing for colleges and the workforce, so ASD will continue to support their transition by assisting students with transcripts, scholarship applications, etc.

Staff will reach out to each family of students with individualized plans to ensure their needs are met. We recognize that flexibility and creativity may be required to accommodate and work through individual issues in meeting students' unique needs.

In thinking about our seniors, I want to share my deepest heartfelt apologies with you. Your final experiences in ASD are certainly not how we wanted to send you into this world. You were born as we mourned the loss of life and liberty as 911 occurred at the time of your birth and now, it feels other freedoms we take for granted have been suspended as you enter adulthood. Your senior prom, spring concerts and sports, and commencement ceremonies will be affected by the present national emergency.

Please know our community is with you. We know the sacrifices you will be making during this time. Later this week, a message will be sent with updates to our seniors directly to answer your many inquiries. Today, I wanted you to know that I am so, so sorry that so much has changed for you. Remember...you are important, you are strong, you are the future.

In summary, our day to day life now is not what any of us expected. I know as a community, a state, a country and in our world we will get through this together and find a way back to the life we used to live. It is critical that each of us do our part. I know our efforts can make a difference, maybe a difference in my family circle as I have family members that are elderly. Maybe our sacrifice will make a difference in your family too. Collectively we all matter; individually we are all worth the inconvenience, the restrictions, and the sacrifices. Thank you.