



March 14, 2020

Dear Garrison Community:

As you may be aware the Putnam County Executive ordered the closing of schools next week due to the unfolding emergency surrounding the Coronavirus (COVID-19). A directive from Governor Cuomo is likely to follow which will supersede the County order. However, at this time, the GUFSS Board of Education and Dr. Debra Jackson, Interim Superintendent, have determined the most realistic course of action is to close the Garrison School to students and suspend all activities and transportation in and out of district from March 16, 2020 until April 13, 2020. This action is effective immediately, but subject to change based upon governmental executive orders or at the discretion of the GUFSS Board.

We hope to lift this closure in the coming weeks, but we do not want to mislead, and want you to be able to plan accordingly. Of course, if circumstances change, we will make an announcement as soon as we can. Communications will be sent via email, phone and/or text, but will be available under the GUFSS NEWS tab of the school website. Although the school will be closed to students, the building, District and GUFSS Board will continue to operate. If you have specific building-related concerns, please contact our principal, Alex Levine.

On Wednesday, March 18, 2020, course work for the K-8 will resume electronically via online platforms. Over the last week, the staff has been training for this inevitability, orienting students and supplying technology when needed. The Superintendent, Principal and/or your children's teachers will be in contact regarding the next steps, assignments and the online platforms students will be using, and scheduling remote parent-teacher conferences. We also encourage children to read and write and create, and stream online educational programs. If you have specific educational concerns, please contact your child's teachers.

If you are a parent of a high school student or out of district student, we will attempt to communicate with you separately and directly regarding the status of your student's schools and possible transportation needs.

The decision to close the school is based upon a few factors. First: We must protect the health and welfare of our employees, children, parents, immune-compromised residents, and the senior population in and related to our community. Second: We have a responsibility to participate in slowing the rate of viral transmission so as to not overwhelm the healthcare system. Third: By limiting the impact on the health care

system, medical professionals will be able to treat patients who may have other medical needs. It is paramount we protect the most vulnerable.

By closing the school, we are practicing what public health professionals call social distancing. Limiting social interaction controls the rate of infection. As such, it only makes sense that we request you practice the same measures according to your capability: Stay home. Wash hands. Avoid socializing, play dates, parties, sleepovers, movie theaters, malls etc. Try to limit your exposure and only venture into public areas when necessary. If we all participate in social distancing, the lives saved will be profound. If we treat this closure as we would a typical break, we will undermine the purpose of this closure. The good news is that it is getting warmer and outdoor activities such as hiking, biking and running are encouraged.

While you will receive communications from our Principal and teachers regarding remote teaching and learning and how that will be scheduled and organized, please know that we are working in other areas as well. Jocelyn Apicello, Trustee and Professor of Public Health, will be your contact person for community support and questions you might have regarding the pandemic and public health. She will be sending out a separate communication regarding those concerns. Trustee Sarah Tormey will be in contact regarding the status of committee work. Additionally, we continue the search for a new Superintendent.

We understand this decision has a profound impact upon your daily life. It is an adjustment for all of us, and we also recognize that this closure may affect individuals disproportionately. As Board President, I am grateful for the guidance and leadership Dr. Debra Jackson has provided. Her experience and depth of understanding has been truly remarkable and extraordinarily helpful. Additionally, each member of the GUFSS Board has been working diligently, reading literature, tracking decisions in neighboring districts and reflecting carefully on this matter. I thank them for their time and consideration. Their service to the community during these dramatic and disconcerting times is exemplary.

Sincerely,

Dr. Debra Jackson, Interim Superintendent.  
James Hoch, Board President. Courtney McCarthy, Vice-President.  
Jocelyn Apicello, David Gelber, Jill Corson Lake, Matthew Speiser, Sarah Tormey,  
Trustees of the Garrison Union Free School District