

Snohomish County's March 27 Press Briefing

To say that these are unprecedented times or we are in uncharted waters is an understatement. K-12 education is a core institution of our society and we've been called upon to completely reinvent our model and meet the needs of our students, families and communities. For all the chaos that is occurring I know good will come out in the end. Education will be changed forever.

From the very beginning of this situation, school districts number one priority was and is keeping our students and staff safe. Safety was key as early on we educated our communities on the seriousness of the coronavirus, safety precautions of washing your hands, don't touch your face, sneeze or cough into your elbow and the new term that will define this generation, social distancing. As leaders of the districts, we knew we were only one phone call away from closing a school or entire district, as many of us did.

When Governor Inslee closed schools and Superintendent Reykdal provided guidance, school districts were primarily charged with three things:

1. Meals
2. Childcare
3. Access to Learning

Meals – Logistically, this initiative has been very complex, but all districts across Snohomish county quickly put a process in place and many, like the Snohomish School District, served meals on the first day we were closed.

There have really been two delivery models for this service – one is a pick-up service, typically at elementary schools and the other is delivering meals via school buses on their routes.

Snohomish School District does a hybrid as we deliver with school buses and then at the end of the route the buses go to an elementary to provide a pick-up service. This has been very successful as we are now serving more than 1,500 meals per day and we expect that number to increase.

In the Sultan School District, recently that district in north Snohomish County served more than 1,900 meals in one day.

Childcare – Huge thanks to our community partners that were already providing childcare and just expanded their services. Most schools across the county are

partnering with the Boys and Girls Club and/or YMCA. In talking to my colleagues, childcare is being used, but not to the extent it was first thought it would be. In the Snohomish School District, we are partnering with both the Boys and Girls Club and the YMCA. Currently we have three sites open, and we are ready to expand when the need arises.

Access to Learning - I can remember at the beginning when we were thinking schools might be closed, many said we would just have to flip to online learning. To switch models is not simple, and at every turn, ten more decisions have to be made. Many thought the difficulty was providing technology and access to the internet, although seemingly overwhelming, in action it was a process and some districts were already ahead of the game by being a 1:1 district.

The true challenge is in education itself, educating all students. Access and tracking is difficult as we do not know when and how long each student is connecting, or if connecting at all that day. What about measuring progress, how is a student doing, collecting work or grading? If we grade, are we assessing on what the child knows, or is it impacted by their internet speed or classroom conditions. As educators, will tackle all these problems and under the circumstances students will receive an education. The best tool we have are our dedicated teachers and staff who are eager to connect with each child.

In a discussion with my School Board we understood the challenges, but decided to not let perfect get in the way of good. To start and to rely on our professionals. To know we are in this together and work through whatever issues may arise with our families. Education next Friday may be totally different than it is today. However, we have one constant - K-12 education is the connection between the teacher and the student.

Seniors – We need to ensure that the school closures do not provide an obstacle for graduation.

Seniors must complete three areas to graduate:

1. High School and Beyond Plan
2. Required number of credits
3. Graduation pathway (involves eight different paths)

Because there are so many different options, graduation is very complex and is really student specific. In Snohomish, we know it is going to be a student-by-

student situation to get them their diploma. Almost all seniors are on track and what we must do next is decide on how to assign credits for this last semester.

A real game changer will be how long the closure lasts. If we come back on April 27, things get easier. If not, we will still get our seniors to graduation.

We are also waiting for further guidance from the State Board of Education. They are contemplating allowing the waiver of credits provided the student made a good faith effort.

Essential Learning - With all these different options, we know there is still essential learning that needs to be done. We must provide students the opportunity to work with their teachers to master those standards needed for their next step in life.

Lastly, we cannot overlook the mental and emotional toll this is on our kids. For seniors they may miss or have drastically changed once in a lifetime events. What will the graduation ceremony look like? How about award banquets, sports competitions, musicals, band concerts. For all of our other students, how is this closure going to manifest itself in the future. The same for our staff and families.

As Superintendent of the Snohomish School District, I am sure I share the same thoughts of my colleagues across the county. We will get through this, we have dedicated and passionate teachers and staff that want to do the best and by working with our families we will adjust, evaluate and adjust again to best serve our students and families.