Superintendent’s Corner: Proactive Planning for COVID-19
From Superintendent David Hopson

Huntington – Coronavirus, now known as COVID-19, is certainly making the news. Whether this will become a ‘Pandemic’ is yet to be determined but the fact that this is impacting people around the world, and in our state, means that we need to review our protocols and practices. We did develop, with state and local resources, a useful pandemic plan in 2006 (during the avian flu) that addressed a number of issues.

Whether or not the COVID-19 becomes pandemic, public health statisticians advise that we are due—in fact, overdue—for a pandemic influenza outbreak. Unlike the seasonal flu, pandemic flu is defined as a global outbreak of a new, serious virus that people have little natural immunity to. Statistically, this happens three times every 100 years.

Our plan covers four major areas: distributing information to students and families in how to avoid getting the flu; determining the appropriate times to close and then reopen schools; developing a continuation of authority as administrators become ill, and to determine how education might continue if the schools are closed for a lengthy period of time. These areas are required by the state in planning for continuity of operations (COOP).

We decided that we should add a fifth area of concern, which is aligning emergency plans with local towns. This was so that we would have an early warning of an impending wave of absences due to illness, that we have the capability to distribute information throughout the six towns, and that towns may request the schools to function as potential emergency centers if the incidences are sufficiently high that the pandemic overwhelms local hospitals.

We hope that, as the government did in 2006, that funding and additional planning help will be available to the district and our member towns. The district is still certified as an emergency shelter and a dispensing location but we were able to use staff to help run clinics in the past. It may be important to revisit and activate Memorandums of Understanding with our towns and local health providers as a precautionary measure and we, therefore, are moving forward with this aspect of our planning.

In the meantime, we have begun to post information sent to us from various government services on the district’s website. Much of this information will prove useful to families exposed to even our regular illnesses such as the common cold or seasonal flu. Many of these also have links for those individuals that wish to do some additional reading. At this point, we are assured by the authorities that this is a low incident threat that may not impact our area. I certainly hope that is true and we do not have to activate any of these plans, but it is generally better to be proactive than reactive.

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