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NEWS RELEASE FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

TO: LOCAL NEWS MEDIA

FROM: PICKENS COUNTY SCHOOLS, JASPER, GEORGIA

RE: "LOCK-OUTS" EFFECTIVE WEDNESDAY

Jasper, GA – Pickens County schools and worksites will begin "hard lock-outs" effective Wednesday, according to Destini Shope, Public Information Officer and Community Engagement Director. This action is in response to two cases of COVID-19 being reported by the Public Health Department in Pickens County this past weekend. Although neither case is believed to be a school system employee, increased precautions are being taken to protect faculty and staff.

According to officials, school doors will be locked, similar to other county offices, and the public will be prevented from entering school buildings except in extraordinary cases. School employees will continue working from home, as most have been doing since schools were closed on March 16, when students switched from direct instruction to online learning as planned and conducted by their teachers. Telephone inquiries will be transferred to voice mail for administrators and staff, who will check messages during the normal school day.

Only those faculty and staff members with urgent needs will be allowed to enter the buildings, and restricted access and social distancing (six feet apart) are expected. Meetings and professional development will continue to be conducted via telecom or video conferences.

Lunchroom workers and bus drivers delivering meals to children 18 years and younger will continue working in kitchen areas and at the bus garage during limited times two days per week. Meals will now be delivered by bus drivers on Mondays and Thursdays, with two or three days of non-perishable breakfasts and lunches being provided on these two days at the same locations as previously announced. Currently, bus drivers are delivering mid-day meals to more than 500 students per day.

No employee is required to report to work if they have concerns about their health. In fact, those age 60 and older and those with compromised immune systems are strongly encouraged to work only from home. Any employee feeling sick is expected to stay at home, and if necessary, contact their local health provider.

Although no employee will lose pay or benefits during this time, Interim School Superintendent Dr. Charles Webb said that the past few weeks have been "all-hands-on-deck,"

and he is thankful for the attitude of school system employees to “deliver the goods,” whether it is online instruction or meals or other services.

“However, we are entering a more dangerous and susceptible period with the Coronavirus now documented in our community,” said Webb. “In order to further protect school system employees, we are implementing the necessary contingency plans previously prepared by our principals and staff.”

“This community has some of the most creative, flexible, dedicated and loyal school employees with which I have ever worked,” said Webb. “Their spirit and cooperation during these uncertain times say a lot about how much they care about the boys and girls in this community. We are truly blessed, and we need to take care of them.”

Webb added how much he and the board of education appreciate the community groups and businesses which have helped during the past few weeks.

“A good example is how ETC stepped forward immediately to help provide ‘hot spots’ throughout the county for students who did not have internet access,” he remarked. “There are many, many of our employees and citizens working behind the scenes to make things possible.”

Webb added that school leaders especially appreciate the help and support from public health officials, hospitals and health care facilities, civic clubs, county government and cities in sharing information and resources.

“Everyone is working together,” he said. “Our high school just recently provided local first responders with a supply of masks and other health items originally acquired for health-related classes, and this week our nurses are transferring our storage of thermometers and other items for front-line health care providers to use. I am seeing that kind of cooperation among all groups throughout the community.”

Webb said that he did not know when traditional school would return.

“Nobody knows at this time,” he said, “but until that time, we especially want to help those in need and continue supporting our students, as well as protecting their teachers and other school employees.”

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