MEMORANDUM

TO: ESBOCES Staff
FROM: Julie Davis Lutz, Ph.D.
DATE: March 14, 2020
RE: Coronavirus (COVID-19) Update

I write to update you on the quickly evolving situation related to the Novel Coronavirus-19. As an educational institution and a regional provider of services, we have quickly found ourselves in the midst of what is now being referred to as a global pandemic. It is unprecedented in the effect that it is having on our communities, the school districts we serve, our students, and of course each of us as human beings. The challenge to the Eastern Suffolk BOCES family is how we will rise to the occasion for those we serve on the many fronts that we serve them.

There is currently remarkable stress and pressure on you as individuals, on all of us as professionals, on us as an agency, a state, and a nation. There is not only a rising risk of illness, but an equally and perhaps more impactful rising state of uncertainty about the future and about expected disruption to our lives. If you are in need of support, I urge you to contact the Employee Assistance Program (631-289-0480).

All of this puts me in a position to ask of you things that perhaps I haven’t needed to ask before. A request for you to be committed to our mission, patient and resilient in the circumstances, and flexible with what things might look like as we move forward to provide educational services that transform the lives of the people that we serve in ways that we have never done before. We are an incredibly committed resourceful, innovative staff. I don’t for a minute doubt our ability to continue to follow our mission, in the midst of these circumstances.

As you are well aware, we serve school districts with incredibly different needs and varying resources. Over our history, we have always adjusted our services to meet their changing needs. In my thirty years with the agency, we have never seen circumstances change quite as rapidly as they are in this situation. However, that doesn’t alter our ability to pause, plan, and move forward doing what we do so well.

I want to provide you with some concrete information related to COVID-19, and what should and should not be a concern. Information on that changes daily, so I am directing you to two places for guidance, the National Center for Disease Control, which can be found at the following link, https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/index.html, and the New York State Department of Health website, which can be accessed here: https://www.health.ny.gov/diseases/communicable/coronavirus/.
The important points to remember are:

- Handwashing and universal precautions are still the best ways to limit the spread of disease.
- If you are sick, stay home!
- If you have questions or concerns about your sick time, contact the Department of Human Resources at 631-687-3029.
- If you are not symptomatic and have not been asked to self-quarantine, you are able to come to work.
- Students who are not sick are welcome to come to their ESBOCES program regardless of the status in their home school district. A school district closure does not make a student or anyone related to that district subject to quarantine.

On Friday, March 13, I had a meeting with agency leadership to update them on the actions taken to date and to answer their questions. I thank them for the leadership that they are providing to all of you as this situation unfolds. Daily communication is occurring between ESBOCES leadership and the New York State Education Department, New York State Department of Health, Suffolk County leadership, Suffolk County Department of Health, as well as the leadership of the 69 school districts in Suffolk County. Information related to the status of the situation in the state and county, recommendations of best practices, and the plans of our component school districts are changing quickly. We are monitoring the evolving situation, so that we are in a position to respond accordingly.

Our opening and closing protocols have always been driven by the needs of our school districts and will continue to be based on that. The factors that go into those decisions, which were built on inclement weather situations, will need to be somewhat different, but will continue to be done in a way that makes sense for all.

Please be aware, there is a possibility that school districts and ESBOCES will be closed for students and or staff for an extended period of time. That will impact our functioning in ways that have not yet been defined, and may impact some of our programs and offices differently than others. Those of you who have school-aged children may want to plan for childcare needs in the event that our schedule is inconsistent with the schedule of your home school district.

We do not yet know what the next phase of this pandemic will be. We do not know how long it will take to slow the spread of COVID-19, or when we will return to some sense of normalcy. However, in the meantime we will remain committed to serving the needs of our students and school districts as best we can. As we move forward as an Eastern Suffolk BOCES family, I thank you for your patience and understanding. I will continue to keep you informed.

JDL/km