

LEFT WITH AN EMPTY FEELING

Virus closes school until at least after Spring Break

By Gabby Lopez,
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It started out as a joke to most high school students, something that everyone thought was going to pass by in a couple of days and that would be the end of it.

But when Gov. Gretchen Whitmer announced at 11 p.m. on Thursday, March 12, that all K-12 schools would be closed for three weeks (March 16-April 6), the jokes stopped as reality set in.

"School closing definitely threw me for a loop. I had a feeling it was going to be closed for a short period of time in order to thoroughly clean the building, but I was not expecting this long of a closing," senior Katelyn Zaagman said. "It's funny because if we were younger or in a different grade, I'm sure we would think this break is a blessing. However, being a

senior, this break is frustrating and concerning. I, and I'm sure many others, are fearing that the end-of-the-year senior events are going to get canceled. It's scary since we've been looking forward to these things for 14 years."

Since Gov. Whitmer's first announcement, she made a second Executive Order on Monday, March 23 of "stay home, stay safe" until April 13, which means the earliest students would return to school would be April 14.

Zaagman's fears were on the minds of teachers too.

So much so that English teacher Kimberly Bradshaw, along with business teacher Judy Hunt, and English teachers Shelly Brower, Roxanne Schaner and Jolynn Walek, sent an email to the senior class on March 20.

In it, she wrote, "I, along with the other teachers and staff, want you to know that we, too, feel your pain. We, too, feel for all of you that the senior year you have dreamed about seems to be heading in such a different direction. And more, we believe in you and your ability to make the most of this situation, to chart your own course. The direction the rest of this year takes and how you handle it is very much up to you, so here is some advice to help you take charge and navigate the coming weeks."

Prior to Whitmer's first announcement, Shores' students were already being affected.

The band trip to Ireland had been canceled, the spring musical *Matilda* was postponed and hoped to be rescheduled for the end of April, and all of the spring sports (softball, soccer, etc.) were put on pause until further notice. Additionally, other events and trips was canceled or postponed.

In the absence of face-to-face education, students and teachers were facing uncharted territory.

Teachers are expected to communicate with students

BY THE NUMBERS

The coronavirus, which began in Wuhan, China, had nearly 312,000 confirmed cases, as of March 22, according to the Johns Hopkins Coronavirus Resource Center. Michigan's count of confirmed cases reached 790 with seven deaths. Muskegon County has not had any confirmed cases of the coronavirus neighboring counties (such as Ottawa County) have had a confirmed case or cases.



Typically, the student parking lot would be teeming with automobiles, but on Friday, March 20, not one car was found as Shores, like every other school district in Michigan, was closed down due to coronavirus COVID-19. (Photo by Gabby Lopez)

during this closure, but assignments and/or other material is not mandatory and cannot be put in as a grade.

"To be clear, this shutdown is very different from our 'snow day closures,'" principal Jennifer Bustard said in a March 20 email to the community. "Students are expected to be learning and working each day. This will look different depending upon the grade level and the access to online resources that each family has."

Additionally, the Federal Government announced on March 20 that all state assessments will be waived for the 2019-2020 school year. What that means at this time is students will not take the PSAT or SAT this school year.

One group that Shores administrators are paying special attention to is the Class of 2020.

"Our seniors have our full attention to ensure that steps are taken so that students will have the ability to earn their MSHS diploma," Bustard and O'Brien wrote in a joint email on March 20. "We are working on plans to honor and celebrate the Class of 2020 with the many traditions we have in place."

The two leaders said Prom, Honors Convocation, Graduation will take place regardless of the end of school date even if it may mean that these celebrations are moved to a later time frame.

"For now, we must stay patient as frustrating as that is," the joint email said. "Schedules and plans will be shared as soon as possible."

Both stressed that it is not a matter of "if" seniors will graduate; it is a matter of "when."

"For now, we will stay hopeful and optimistic that we will return soon," the joint email said. "As of today [March 20], we still plan on the original graduation date. (All students

should) keep in contact and stay engaged with your teachers as they are working very hard to provide you with the best of learning opportunities."

Shores Schools also have been able to provide breakfast and lunch for all students during this shutdown. In the first week, a large corps of volunteers helped pack 6,000 meals in bags to hand out to families.

Since Governor Whitmer declared that all schools be closed for three weeks, there has since been a ban on gatherings of 50 or more people, and all restaurants and bars are issued to close their doors unless for pick-up or drive-thru services.

Two of the most important things that the CDC said people need to do is to practice "social distancing," and to wash hands thoroughly on a regular basis.

But the fight from the Coronavirus (COVID-19) is far from over.

"As you know, there is no playbook for this, and we are all in this together as it changes each day," superintendent Bill O'Brien said in an email to the community on March 19. "As you know, each day brings new information, guidance, and response from local and state leaders."

O'Brien and Bustard have continued to keep students, teachers and the community informed, and they know the impact this has on everyone.

"It is frustrating for all of us," the two leaders wrote in a joint email on March 20, "much of which we cannot control. But there are things we can control and that is with our efforts to commit to the containment procedures that begin with practicing Social Distancing, adhering to the Governor's orders on unnecessary travel, hygiene and staying home. Sacrifice today will be critical for all."