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Michelle Dutrow, Superintendent

Subject: COVID-19 Coronavirus Information and Preparedness

Dear West Branch Parents and Guardians:

As the COVID-19 coronavirus continues to lead our daily news, we are reaching out today to let you know that West Branch Area School District, along with the neighboring Clearfield County school districts of Philipsburg-Osceola, Moshannon Valley, Clearfield, and Curwensville, **will remain open at this time**. In addition, we want to inform you of our rationale for remaining open at this time and share the steps being taken to protect the health and welfare of students, staff, and families among our Districts.

While several universities across the region, and at the time of this letter, Penn State University contemplating alterations to their semester schedule and their instruction, it is important to recognize significant differences between a university setting and a public K-12 school setting. Most obvious is the sheer size of the campus in terms of student population lends itself to increased risk. At Penn State University, with over 30,000 students living, studying, and socializing in close proximity to one another, and the opportunity for more global interactions among their students and staff based on their recent spring break, the rate of disease transmission is likely to increase. This is compounded by infrequent cleaning of student dormitory rooms, large theater-style classes with 200-500 students, and limited medical personnel on campus. This is not the case in our Clearfield County School Districts. Comparatively, our student population is small, and we are somewhat more isolated geographically. This is to our advantage.

Additionally, numerous efforts to prevent or decrease the spread of the virus are being taken in all schools. Every school has a nurse on site, who continually observes and monitors the health status of all students and staff. Our trained medical professionals are instructed to remain diligent in terms of sending students home, who show signs of illness and to be in communication with those families. Custodial staff in every building is also working hard at making sure facilities are clean and common surfaces are sanitized on a daily basis.

With regard to the school calendar and attendance, PA Secretary of Education, Pedro Rivera, notified school districts:

“While instructional time and assessments are important state and federal requirements, as you continue to work with your local health and emergency officials to review and revise your pandemic plans, the primary goal of any plan should be preserving the health and safety of your students and staff.

When making contingency plans, you should consider using all available tools to meet instructional time, to include re-purposing snow days and Act 80 days built into your calendar or extending the school calendar.

At this time, all students, families, and staff members are urged to keep any plans flexible throughout the month of June. While the District currently does not plan to close, if we are required/recommended to close, by state officials, we would explore the options of utilizing the days during the Easter Break, add days onto the end of school up to June 30, or a combination of both.

We will continue to monitor the situation and can guarantee that all decisions regarding the possible closing of schools will be made with the best interests of students and staff in mind. We are taking direction from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Pennsylvania Department of Health, and the Pennsylvania Department of Education, and can assure you that our first priority is to maintain the safety and well-being of all students and staff.

We appreciate all the efforts that everyone involved are taking during this uneasy time. We will continue to keep the school community members updated with new information as it is received.

If you have questions, please do not hesitate to contact the District at (814)-345-5615.

Sincerely,

Michelle Dutrow

Superintendent of Schools