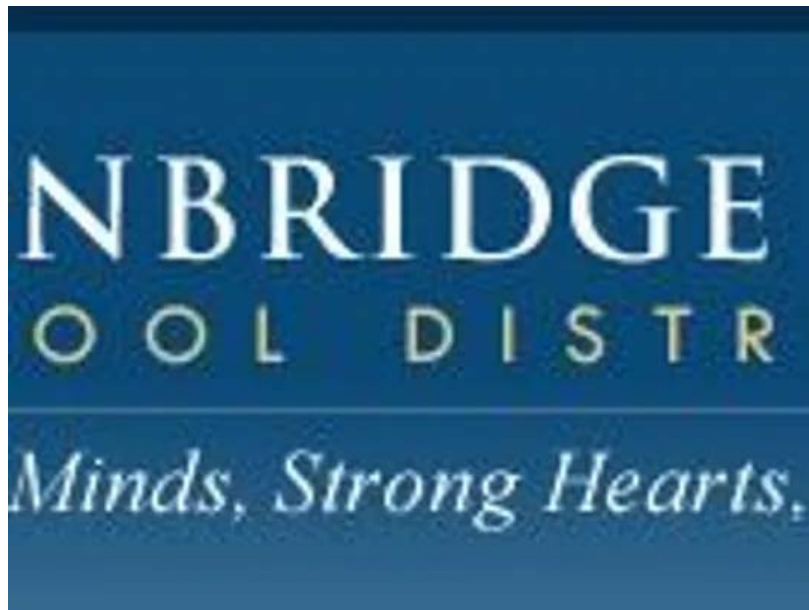


Bainbridge Island schools to close for two days amid rising COVID-19 concerns

Chris Henry, Kitsap Sun Published 5:59 p.m. PT March 11, 2020



Bainbridge Island School District logo (Photo: contributed)

BAINBRIDGE ISLAND — Bainbridge Island School District announced late Wednesday that schools will be closed for the rest of the week amid rising concerns about the coronavirus.

There are no confirmed cases within the district of COVID-19, the respiratory illness caused by the virus, according to a news release on BISD's website from Superintendent Peter Bang-Knudsen, but an increase in staff absences is affecting operations.

[Bainbridge Island has two confirmed cases of COVID-19 \(/story/news/2020/03/10/coronavirus-washington-state-bainbridge-island-case-positive/5011421002/\)](/story/news/2020/03/10/coronavirus-washington-state-bainbridge-island-case-positive/5011421002/), according to the Kitsap Public Health District. One of the cases is a person in their 60s, the other is in their 70s, according to the health district. They are the only cases that have been identified so far in Kitsap County.

"Our district is experiencing an increase in staff absences, and we are at the cusp of not having enough staff to safely operate our schools," Bang-Knudsen said. "In addition, today we also heard from Gov. (Jay) Inslee that districts should prepare now for the possible long-term closure of schools. Because of these two factors, BISD schools will be closed on Thursday, March 12, and Friday, March 13, in order for us to continue the planning process."

Kitsap roups, after-school activities impacted

Also on Wednesday, both Central Kitsap and North Kitsap school districts announced the curtailment of after-school activities and sports. North Kitsap said in an email late Wednesday afternoon that the district is "suspending all after school and evening activities, athletics, and events in our schools." It also said it's closing facilities to outside groups, in addition to the North Kitsap pool. The closure is effective on Thursday, according to the district, and will last through spring break.

More: [Making the call on canceling events in Kitsap amid coronavirus fears \(/story/news/2020/03/11/coronavirus-cancelled-events-kitsap-washington-covid-19-deaths/5025490002/\)](/story/news/2020/03/11/coronavirus-cancelled-events-kitsap-washington-covid-19-deaths/5025490002/)

Central Kitsap School District announced its suspension of after-school activities on Wednesday and said it, too, would be closing its facilities to outside groups through spring break.

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Bainbridge school administrators did not say why more staff are unavailable for work, and district officials were unavailable for comment late Wednesday.

More: [Custodians are on the front line of keeping schools clean amid coronavirus fears \(/story/news/2020/03/07/coronavirus-fears-central-kitsap-middle-school-custodians/4987253002/\)](https://www.kitsapsun.com/story/news/2020/03/07/coronavirus-fears-central-kitsap-middle-school-custodians/4987253002/)

[Inslee's proclamation included a prohibition on events in King, Snohomish and Pierce counties with more than 250 \(/story/news/2020/03/11/governor-bans-large-gatherings-greater-seattle-area/5022614002/\)](https://www.kitsapsun.com/story/news/2020/03/11/governor-bans-large-gatherings-greater-seattle-area/5022614002/) to curb the spread of the virus, and the governor strongly encouraged state residents to practice social distancing, which means individuals should try to stay six feet or at least an arm's length away from each other.

Other closures across Washington

Inslee is not currently planing to call for widespread school closures, but he asked school districts to make contingency plans.

Seattle Public Schools will close for at least two weeks in light of concerns about the virus, according to an article Wednesday in the Seattle Times, and the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction lists scores of schools in Western Washington that have or will have closures related to the virus.

"We know this is an unsettling time. Not only are there fears surrounding the virus itself, but there is uncertainty on how the measures taken to slow the virus will impact daily lives and expectations," Bang-Knudsen said. "As the situation surrounding school closures evolves, new questions will arise — some we will know the answers to, and some we will need time to figure out. We ask for your patience and your support as we work through this time together."

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