Dear Huntsville ISD Families,

With our Spring Break closure scheduled for next week, I wanted to take the opportunity to update you on the district’s efforts surrounding the growing concern of the respiratory illness caused by the 2019 novel (new) coronavirus (COVID-19). Huntsville ISD is aware of the coronavirus outbreak and is closely monitoring the events. We are following the guidance of our local health officials, the Texas Department of State Health Services (Texas DSHS) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). While these trustworthy health officials believe the risk to our school community is low at this time, we will continue to track the situation and follow their direction as this situation develops and make plans accordingly for the health and safety of our students, staff and community.

The 2019 novel coronavirus is a virus that causes respiratory illness in people and can spread from person-to-person. At this time, persons considered at risk are those with travel to China, or those in close contact with persons infected with the novel coronavirus. The coronavirus is not currently wide spread in communities in the United States, and there are no confirmed cases here in Walker County or the surrounding area. Updated information from the CDC on coronavirus in the United States can be found at: https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html. The most recent information about coronavirus in Texas can be found at: https://dshs.texas.gov/coronavirus/.

Much information is still being learned about this newly emerged virus. Based on the current information, health officials are recommending local communities and schools should take the same simple preventive actions to help prevent the spread of this coronavirus as we do to prevent the spread of other everyday illnesses like the common cold or the flu:

- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.
- Cover your mouth and nose with the inside of your elbow when you cough or sneeze.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces.
- Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
- Stay home when you are sick.

The coronavirus is spread through the air when an infected person coughs or sneezes, much in the same way the flu and other respiratory viruses are spread. Symptoms can be fever, cough, or difficulty breathing. While a new type of illness can be scary, we can protect our students, employees, and the broader community by using these preventative steps that also protect people from other types of respiratory viruses. Our teachers, school nurses, and staff have been working carefully to encourage these simple and effective habits of frequent handwashing, covering every cough or sneeze, and cleaning classroom tables/surfaces frequently. This is important not just to help prevent the spread of coronavirus but to help prevent the spread of other infections that can lead to student illness and absences.

The Huntsville ISD custodial staff has increased cleaning frequency since early fall in response to expanding flu cases. Using hospital-grade products, they have enhanced their efforts this month to disinfect all classrooms and common contact surfaces nightly to help offset the spread of all communicable illnesses. Over spring break, additional steps to deep clean and disinfect will be taken. When we return from the break, HISD Transportation will begin a daily routine treatment of disinfecting buses following each route. As a reminder, we are still in the midst of cold and flu season, and it’s important for all families to take preventative measures to safeguard themselves. We have shared additional links to helpful health related resources on the district website at: https://www.huntsville-isd.org/health.

Thank you for your support of our district, our schools, our students, and our teachers and staff. I hope you have a very safe, healthy and restful break.

Sincerely,
Scott Sheppard, Ed.D.
Huntsville ISD Superintendent

All Students thrive as lifelong learners and global citizens prepared for the futures they create.