COVID-19: Schools to close on March 13 for staff professional development

IMAGE COURTESY DARKO STOJANOVIC/PIXABAY Montclair's schools are starting preparations in the event of an outbreak of COVID-19 in Montclair.

All Montclair schools will be closed on Friday, March 13, so staff can be trained in online instruction in the event of a school closure related to COVID-19.

"We want to standardize our procedures so that we can offer this [online instruction] in a smooth, consistent manner," district officials said.

District officials have been in discussions regarding online instruction and other alternative learning methods for the past few weeks.

Although no one in Essex County has tested positive to COVID-19, on Monday, a Montclair school staff member was tested for COVID-19 and will remain in self-quarantine at home until her laboratory results are returned, said school officials.

On Tuesday, March 10, the district reiterated that the staffer, who shares time between Hillside and Glenfield, has not yet been confirmed as either positive or negative, since the test results are still pending. Once the test results are known, officials said, that information will be communicated to the public and appropriate next steps will be taken if needed.

Cleaning and sanitization of all buildings took place on March 5. The cleaning included surfaces that may be touched by hands, including lockers, desk tops, grab bars, door knobs and tiled wall surfaces.

Students who become ill are asked to stay home. However, parents have been advised that if they choose to keep their children who are asymptomatic at home, they will be marked as absent.

The district also said that the staff is ready to assist students and families who may be experiencing anxiety or other emotional issues due to the outbreak, and referred families to a list of resources provided by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The district added, "Fear and anxiety about this disease may lead to social stigma and discrimination. This is never acceptable and is very hurtful."

-Erin Roll