

## Wabaunsee county schools close due to COVID-19

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Wabaunsee students will be out of school for at least two more weeks.

Wabaunsee County Health Administrator Ray Finley made the decision to close both school districts in Wabaunsee County for two weeks, until March 30, including all activities and athletic events, the district announced Saturday afternoon. The precautions are part of a nation-wide attempt to curb the spread of COVID-19 (Coronavirus).

Surrounding high schools, including Manhattan, Junction City and Topeka Schools have closed for precautionary reasons. Many colleges including K-State, KU,

Emporia State University, Fort Hays University and Johnson County Community College have extended spring break and will switch in-person classes to online for the foreseeable future.

COVID-19, also known as the coronavirus, is an infectious disease caused by a new virus that had not been previously identified in humans. The virus causes respiratory illness similar to the flu, with symptoms such as a cough, fever and in more severe cases, pneumonia.

In his message to citizens, Finley explained his decision to shut schools. "We understand that we do not have any COVID-19 cases in our county and surrounding area. But with the travel of families and students during spring

break, we must take every precaution for students, staff and the community."

Superintendent Brad Starnes addressed some concerns in an email Saturday afternoon. The closure causes potential issues for the length of the school year. Options including adding minutes to the day will be discussed in the coming days. The Kansas Department of Education may also waive some requirements for affected districts this year.

Starnes urged teachers to work hard to plan to meet educational standards for students, even though they may lose time in the classroom.

Starnes also said the district would explore continuing to provide meals for some students, but

they need to determine a safe way to provide them to students who rely on them.

As for activities, the Kansas State High School Activities Association canceled the final two days of the state basketball tournament. Regional Music Festivals scheduled for March 28 and April 4 have been canceled and will not be rescheduled. A decision about the spring sport seasons has not yet been made, although practices were canceled statewide for at least a week and will not take place in USD 329 while schools are closed.

*What questions do you have about the school closings? How is it affecting your family? Let us know at whscharger@gmail.com.*

### OPINION

## Potential loss of sports, activities worries seniors

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With COVID-19 being passed around like wildfire, many sports programs decided to end seasons early.

The NBA suspended the season after a Jazz player preliminarily tested positive for the Coronavirus. The NCAA cancelled the winter and spring championships to combat the problem. Both organizations had a very valid reason to end the season, since health comes above sports, but many athletes did not want to see the end so suddenly.

From the NBA to the NCAA to KSHSAA, the ending of many seasons crushed the dreams many hopeful athletes had to be named the top dog.

KSHSAA ended the state basketball tournament after finishing the quarterfinal games. The conclusion of the tournament did not name one team state champions, instead it only left teams upset. The athletes that earned the honor of playing at the state tournament do not want getting there to be the only thing, they want to win.

Schools that remained in the tournament can not 'name' themselves the 2019-2020 state champions — No one can.

Most schools in Kansas are closed for at least the next two weeks. With the ending of these classes, many sport teams are not able to practice. This not only hurts the students by keeping them out of the classroom, it also hurts the student-athlete's drive.

That word after student carries around a lot of weight. Yes, we are students first, but for some of us, the drive to succeed comes from being an athlete. The only reason many students show up and participate in class is because they know that's how they can continue their sports careers. Without the shove of athletics many kids would not try in class.

As a senior student athlete, not knowing if my last high school game or competition was the basketball state quarterfinal game breaks my heart. Workouts from track coach Roger Alderman were sent to the track athletes to do their best to stay in shape during this time, but running by myself without getting throwing equipment in my hand can only do so much.

I'm hoping the virus passes and things return to normal, but if they don't, not being able to compete again in a red and blue charger jersey won't be the end of the world. But there will be an opening that I had no way to close. At this point I have no say in how my last season as a Charger ends. With the cancellation and postponement of everything I may never get to run as a WHS athlete again.

There have been so many unknowns that all of us seniors are in the same boat. The boat we are all in is slowly sinking with all the "lasts" we wanted to experience together — our last prom, last sign out sheet, graduation and even our last practice. Nobody knows if we will get to experience things that we have been looking forward to the last 12 school years.

Of course, it's possible that the steps taken by society will flatten the curve of the virus and we will be able to safely return to school and activities soon. That's what we all hope for.

If not, the missed experiences will be a tough pill to swallow.

## Bond election postponed due to virus precautions

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Even with the coronavirus restriction, the USD 329 Board of Education met for its monthly meeting, taking precautions to ensure the safety of the members. During the meeting, the board members distanced themselves from each other and the meeting was live-streamed via the district's Facebook page to follow the new CDC coronavirus guidelines of no more than 10 people in a gathering.

Members once again discussed facilities. With the new challenges

presented by the virus, the board members wanted to figure out their next step. They originally planned to hold a special election in May, but the board didn't know if it was in its best interest. Board president Justin Frank liked the idea of continuing with May because it kept the issue in front of the patrons, but he also wanted to be able to hold town hall meetings before then. The other members agreed that town hall meetings needed to occur before moving forward with an election, but CDC guidelines and worries about large gatherings made that difficult. Without the town halls

to keep patrons informed, the board decided with a 5-1 vote to postpone the May election to a later date.

Board member Kelly Oliver motioned, "Cancel the May election due to the current situation with COVID-19 surrounding us and the inability to meet face to face. We will continue discussions to look at other dates."

Staff pay was also addressed by superintendent Brad Starnes during the meeting. He said that those who are 12-month employees will be paid normally because their salaries are already budgeted. Nine-month employees that

are dependent on when school is in session will be continued to be paid at their hourly rate at their regular hours for the time that school is out.

### OTHER ITEMS DISCUSSED IN THE BOARD MEETING:

- Potential school resource officer to be partially paid for by a grant

- Possibly adding a shooting club to be organized and financed by an outside group but endorsed by the district

### EDITORIAL

## Closure disappointing, but important to keep us safe

The editorial is the opinion of the Charger staff.  
Send letters to the editor to whscharger@gmail.com.

With new cancellations and closings happening every minute, it's hard not to have coronavirus on our minds.

We here at the Charger believe that, although inconvenient and disorienting, closing down the school and activities is smart and probably necessary.

First, you have to look at the number of students and faculty that have travelled outside of Kansas over spring break. Some have likely been exposed to COVID-19 and it's smart to provide time to practice social distancing and assure that they do not have the virus.

Anyone who has visited anywhere out of the country, as well as certain hot zones such as California, and even airports are likely to have been exposed to COVID-19.

It's worth considering, would you rather lose school time just in case, or go to school and risk spreading this sickness to those who otherwise would not have been exposed?

When we think about how this virus affects people, it's important to look at the bigger picture. There are many people in the community who are elderly or have weakened immune systems,

so decreasing the chances that it reaches them will be better for our community in the long run.

All this being said, we understand how hard this is for our students and community.

The KSHSAA has suspended and canceled many events recently, including but not limited to the State basketball tournament, all Regional Solo and Small Group Festivals and practices for this week.

They have not yet made a decision regarding the spring sports seasons at this time, but amidst the cancellation or collegiate and professional seasons, we're struggling to stay optimistic.

Area colleges are making the move to completely online classes, and some have even canceled all spring sports and activities due to the CDC's warning against gatherings of 50 or more people. K-State is officially shutting down dormitories and has canceled graduation.

WHS and Mission Valley decided to shut down for the next two weeks as recommended by the health department, with classes scheduled to resume March 30. Prom has also been postponed as well as all events scheduled to take place during the next two weeks.

With all of the cancellations and postponements, our thoughts go out to all of the high school seniors who are facing the fact that they may not get to experience some of their high school lasts due to COVID-19.

The biggest thing we can do now though is make sure we are taking the proper precautions in order to prevent this virus from spreading. Proper precautions do not include buying 50 rolls of toilet paper and an entire box of canned food items and wearing those surgical masks everywhere. That is a bit extreme for what we are looking at. What we should be doing now is practicing social distancing, making sure to wash our hands well, avoiding touching our face and just staying calm.

We know that these are stressful times and that we don't know much about COVID-19, but you have to have faith that the medical world will find answers to questions and that they know what they're talking about. Panicking and bulk buying food and other household items will do nothing to stop you from getting this virus. Chances are you've already been exposed to it, unless you've been living alone and haven't left your house in months.

The world has gone through tough times like this before, and we are still here. Just wash your hands.

### The Charger

The Charger is an open forum for student free speech.

Send letters to the editor, story ideas or pictures to  
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