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Big Enough for Choice...Small Enough to Care

October 29, 2009

Dear Parents of Monroe Public Schools Students:

As you know, considerable attention has been given to the recent increase in flu-like illnesses, especially in schools. In some buildings we have seen a very small increase in absences compared with traditional absentee data. We have not seen a major spike in the number of students, teachers or staff calling in sick.

Since there is considerable attention being paid to the spread of the flu and the H1N1 virus, we've been asked recently, "At what point would schools be closed due to absenteeism?" On Wednesday morning, I met with all of the other superintendents of schools in Monroe County and we decided that only if absenteeism across a district reached more than 25 percent would we consider closing our district. This uniformity across the county should make it easier for everyone to understand. It also will help to mitigate the confusion of "Is a school closed? Is a school open?"

To put this into perspective, even with two of our schools reporting building absentee rates of 12 percent to 15 percent earlier this week, most other buildings were in the 6 percent to 10 percent range. This is well within our usual absent rates.

Across our district, we have seen an increase in children bringing a variety of different brands of disinfectant wipes into the schools. We understand your concern for your children's health, but we must ask you to please refrain from sending any of these materials into school. A number of these products are made of hazardous chemicals and some of them even carry precautionary statements such as "Hazardous to humans and domestic animals." Material Safety Data Sheets for some of these wipes even go so far as to recommend special ways to handle them. The Center for Disease Control even says that "School staff should routinely clean areas that students and staff touch often with the cleaners they typically use. CDC does not believe any additional disinfection of environmental surfaces beyond the recommended routine cleaning is required." Thank you for adhering to this request.

Monroe Public Schools, like all other districts in our community, is dedicated to taking whatever prudent steps possible to halt the spread of flu or virus the best way we know how. Your concern is our concern – the health and safety of your children.

Sincerely,

David J. Taylor
Superintendent

