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Good Hope Country Day Closes Campus Over Coronavirus, Initiates Online Learning

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The Good Hope Country Day School announced late Sunday that in light of the coronavirus pandemic reaching the territory's shores, with the first case being confirmed on St. Croix, it will temporarily close its campus effective immediately.

GHCDs, which is currently on spring break, will extend its break by three days, through Wednesday, March 25, for students. Faculty and staff will return to campus on Monday, March 23, for three faculty workdays in which they will make final preparations to port their classes to an online format, the school said.

School will resume in an online format on Thursday, March 26, and will continue in that format for at least 11 school days, until Easter/Passover break.

Online school will take place daily from 8:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m., with breaks, lunch, physical education (that is, exercise), and recess to be spread out through the day. During this time, teachers will work from their classrooms to the extent circumstances and/or USVI authorities will permit. Teachers will make every effort to connect individually and/or in small groups with the students in their classes in a virtual format, to the extent this is possible, GHCDs said.

"As COVID-19 has now reached St. Croix and the Caribbean, and as the U.S. Virgin Islands, most U.S. states, and the federal government have declared states of emergency, thousands of colleges, universities, and schools across the U.S., are temporarily closing their campuses to keep the disease from spreading. GHCDs will join these schools in order to do its part to "flatten the curve" of the spread of illness, diminish the number of people converging on overwhelmed hospitals, and reduce the number of deaths of vulnerable people," the school said.

"The best way to contain COVID-19 is to institute widespread social distancing," William Bugg, head of school at GHCDs, said. "Social distancing is an extremely difficult practice to bring about in school environments like ours, where the close proximity of students and adults is a necessary part of the education process. We have determined that the best way to keep our students, parents, employees and community members healthy is to move our classes online."

If during the period of closure GHCDs students are in need of emotional and counseling support, the school nurse and school counselor will be available for phone and video conversations, the school said.

If conditions warrant, GHCDs will resume school on its campus on the Tuesday following Easter/Passover break, April 14. If it is apparent that a longer closure is necessary, the school will be prepared to deliver online classes through the last day of the school year, Friday, May 29.

According to the release, during the GHCDs campus closure, there will be no academic, athletic, fine and performing arts, or activities involving N-12 students, whether from GHCDs or any other school.

Graduation will take place as scheduled on Saturday, May 30, either in person or virtually. If virtually, GHCDs will offer its Class of 2020 graduates an opportunity to walk in a celebratory commencement ceremony once the public health crisis has passed.

GHCDs said it will also institute a requirement, effective immediately, that students who travel outside the territory before school resumes must undergo a 14-day self-quarantine prior to being permitted to return to campus. The school will continue to stay in touch with USVI health and government officials in the upcoming weeks and months, Bugg said. "The COVID-19 situation—here and everywhere—remains fluid, and we will be prepared to change course as needed."

"I know that closing our school campus will prove difficult for our students and families, socially, economically, and academically," Bugg wrote parents and students in a March 15 letter. "Despite our very best efforts, online education will not be as effective as on-campus learning—as we are, first and foremost, a learning community built on personal connections. We will all be challenged, but we are not alone. The world is enduring the same hardships."

"The threat of novel coronavirus may end up being one of the great challenges of our lifetimes," Bugg continued. "Let us all take comfort from the fact that children are highly unlikely to become seriously ill from COVID-19. And may we all remember to breathe in the refreshing Caribbean air we are so fortunate to enjoy, delight in the beautiful seascapes around us, renew our compassion

for one another, remember the lonely and destitute, support our medical and public health professionals, and embrace one another other—from a distance.”

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