

May 22, 2009

Dear Community Member:

The past month has been an unsettling time in Cold Spring Harbor as we have witnessed a surge of “influenza-like” illness sweep across the New York Metropolitan and suburban areas. Over the past week, it has impacted our community and our schools, resulting in atypically high numbers of absences for this time of year.

The public debate continues over whether or not individuals who are not seriously ill should be tested for H1N1 (Swine) Flu and whether schools should remain open. The former is an issue that I, as a Superintendent of Schools, have no control over; the latter is a decision that I have made. Some parents have challenged my decision to keep the schools open. I respect their points of view and I have considered them. The decision to keep the schools open has not been made lightly, and I believe it is important to share my decision-making process with you.

A critical aspect of decision-making is the reliance on data and the recommendations of experts in a field. Toward that end, I have read all of the guiding documents from the New York State Department of Health, the Center for Disease Control and the Suffolk County Board of Health. Dr. Friedman, our school physician, has also served as a valuable resource, and he has shared both information and his assessment about what he is currently experiencing in his role as a community practitioner. We also have the good fortune of having expert health care professionals and scientists who are members of the Cold Spring Harbor community, some of whom have children in our schools. I have solicited their views on the matter and they have been generous in sharing their expertise. **The consensus among these professionals is that the schools should remain open.**

I understand and agree that “*Wash your hands*” seems highly inadequate in our quest to keep our children safe; however, it is currently our most effective preventative measure. The data informs us that this “flu-like” illness is no more virulent than the seasonal winter flu and that a typically healthy individual experiences mild symptoms and makes a full and timely recovery. There may always be an exception and that is where nature proves, ultimately, that it has more control over circumstances that we humans have.

It is the lack of control over situations such as this one, which causes us to experience fear and anxiety. I understand that feeling. I share in that feeling. I work hard to manage my emotions and not allow them to cloud my judgment, given the current context, with regard to an essential aspect of children’s lives... their education.

I will continue to monitor the situation with the attention that it deserves and communicate with you on a regular basis. Please feel free, as always, to contact me with any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,

Judith A. Wilansky, Ed.D.
Superintendent of Schools