

April 5, 2020

Dear Parents and Caregivers,

I hope you and your families are staying healthy and are continuing to manage, the best you can, working with your children at home. We realize this has been stressful the last several weeks, but we want you to know that we are so thankful for your true partnership with Newtown Public Schools and the shared teaching and learning taking place on behalf of our students. You have done a terrific job!

Distance Learning

Our staff and administrators have continued to work on plans to further the use of interactive digital tools and ongoing support. While teachers have been working with their students and families, we are looking to augment our Alternative Learning Plan to include additional interactive tools for new learning, personalized support, and appropriate assessments. These experiences will elevate our plan so that students, despite not being in the classroom, may still benefit academically and emotionally. **Attached please find our Alternative Plan Updates as developed by teachers, staff, and leaders.**

I have had discussions with many school leaders and reflected on numerous opinions about what to call this new remote learning. To be honest, the “semantics” of what we are providing for our students during this crisis is less important. What IS important is the understanding that Newtown educators are committed to their students and always have their best interests at the forefront. We know that the best thing for students (who find themselves socially isolated and away from school routines) is to maintain structure. Teachers may still provide gentle reminders about work and expectations, as well as academic integrity. Flexibility and understanding are central to our interactions with students right now, so do not hesitate to reach out if your child or children are having challenges with content, workload, or any other issues.

On April 8th, we will be calling for a “quiet Wednesday” to allow our teachers and administrators to engage in professional development to review updates to our plan and to explore the digital tools they can use to support all learners. Students should continue to work (and even catch up) on Wednesday as part of their routine, but teachers will not be responding to emails at this time. They will be sure to address questions or concerns following their Wednesday staff development.

Updates and Reminders

While we do not yet know the actual length of time in which schools will remain closed, we are continuing to implement precautionary measures in alignment with local and State guidance as well as the Governor’s Executive Orders. Social distancing is clearly of utmost importance as we continue to keep families and community members safe. *Please review the following reminders:*

- All school recreational facilities and grounds are closed (e.g., HS stadium, all fields).

- If you need to pick up a device at any of the schools, you will be informed of the specific schedule(s) so that we have these ready for you.
- Any questions or concerns you have regarding the educational activities your child or children have received should be directed to the appropriate staff. More general questions can be forwarded to building leaders, as everyone understands fully the challenges faced by students and families across our community and are prepared to listen and provide support as needed.
- We continue to distribute lunches on Monday and Wednesday at HOM, NMS, and NHS between 8-12 a.m. Please be sure to complete the surveys that are sent out to each home on a weekly basis.
- No school activities will occur on Good Friday, April 10th or during Spring Break, April 13-17th. Staff will not be responding to emails at this time.
- Spring break will give everyone a chance to relax, take some time to unplug, and care for families. Social distancing will still be important at this time, and we ask you to emphasize the importance of this with your children as well.

Final Thoughts

We appreciate and recognize all that you are doing with your students to support teaching and learning. Whether we define this remote learning plan as home schooling, distance or alternative learning, Stephanie Jones and Hillary Hughes, University of Georgia professors, said it best in their recent editorial: "If all of us can take a collective breath and allow ourselves to be in this moment, we can also give our students and their caregivers the space and time everyone needs to learn 'to be' during this time. Together. And apart."

Be well.

Dr. Lorrie Rodrigue, Superintendent