

Superintendent's Update - April 6, 2020

I am very hopeful that this update finds all of our families and your loved ones in good health during this very difficult time. It has been a little over a week since my last correspondence, which was due in part to the many other communications you have been receiving from the schools, our various district level departments, as well as, updates you have received from the Town. In addition, I have waited in hopes of having further information regarding whether or not our schools would reopen again this year. While we are all hopeful that we will once again fill our hallways with our students and staff, the decision of when, and if, remains in question at this point.

As noted by Governor Lamont in Friday's news conference, it is likely that our closure will be well beyond our initial extension of April 20th. In my weekly conference call with our Commissioner of Education, Dr. Miguel Cordona, it was stated that the Department of Education would like to provide notice to families on or before April 10th. At this point, we have to anticipate that an extension is likely due to the infection trend projections that have been shared by the Connecticut Department of Public Health. With the Hartford County peak ranging between May 10th to May 24th, the peak infection trends indicate that our school closure period will be for an indefinite period of time. There are many factors that could change this scenario, which makes it important that we follow this closely in the days and weeks ahead.

In terms of our distance learning, we will continue to follow an incremental approach to assist our students and parents with the transition to online instruction. The abilities of our students, the availability of working parents, and determining the most effective way to provide interactive lessons are the current challenges we will need to overcome in the days and weeks ahead. Although there are some common themes in the feedback we have received from our distance learning surveys, each student and family situation is unique and no single solution is the right answer. We understand the incredible difficulty parents are experiencing with juggling work, family, and now the role of teacher – and we want to support you in any way possible. The district has prepared a tremendous amount of resources that students and parents can access on our district website under our special [Continuity of Learning](#) webpage.

As I will continue to state, distance learning is no replacement for direct instruction and we look forward to the day our students will return to their classrooms. We have already begun planning for their transitions back to school, assessing what additional supports will be needed to make up for the lost instructional time, and reviewing the scope and sequence of our units of study to compensate for learning gaps. We recognize that it is highly likely that our students will be returning to school with varying degrees of content understanding, and we will adjust our instruction to ensure that all students are able to make up for areas that may need further teaching. In the meantime, we ask that our students and parents do their best to utilize the instructional plans that have been developed, as well as, make use of the interactive opportunities that teachers will be providing. Our continuity of learning will inevitably improve with each week, and I thank our students, parents, teachers, and administrators for the incredible efforts being made during this time of tremendous uncertainty.

In terms of technology, our district continues to make every effort to provide a timely

response to Chromebook issues. We have utilized our entire inventory to stretch out our coverage to the primary grades; however, we recognize that additional Chromebooks will be needed if we begin to see replacement needs due to issues with the devices. The district will be purchasing additional Chromebooks in the weeks ahead, but as of right now most of the companies have items on backorder due to the sharp increase in demand. If your child is having an issue with their device, please utilize our SchoolDude management system for technology support. The link for technology support can be found on our district website under [Student Device Tech Support](#).

Lastly, the Board of Education (BOE) will be presenting their FY21 Budget proposal to the Board of Finance (BOF) this evening at 7:00 pm through a Zoom video conference. The BOE will provide the rationale to its proposed 2.12% increase and answer any corresponding questions. Information on how to attend/listen this meeting can be located on the [April 6, 2020 BOE Meeting Agenda](#). I will provide follow-up information to our parent community regarding the town's budget deliberation process in the weeks ahead.

Once again, I appreciate your patience and understanding as it relates to our school closure and the current health crisis we are currently in. If you have any questions, concerns, or suggestions, please do not hesitate to reach out to me.

Sincerely,
Timothy M. Van Tassel