

Dear Merrimack Families~

As you probably know, there was a special meeting of the Merrimack School Board last night. The meeting had a dual purpose. The first was to update the board on our district's response, to date, to the COVID-19 emergency. The second, and related purpose, was to share the implications of the governor's extension of remote learning through May 4<sup>th</sup> on school and district operations. As I indicated at last night's meeting the announcement of the extension of remote learning, necessitated by the on-going virus threat, materially changed our service delivery model, likely for the rest of the year. It was, in every sense of the word, a gamechanger. What follows is a summary of some of some of those changes:

**April Vacation**—Based on survey results of staff and the community, both of which overwhelmingly supported the cancellation of April vacation this year, the school board voted unanimously to do so.

**Establishment of Flex Day**—Based on the emerging understanding of the impact of this health emergency on our personal and professional lives, coupled with a developing understanding of the impact of remote learning on students, parents and teachers, district administration announced the establishment of one flex day per week for all grades K-12 in Merrimack. These are **NOT** days off. Rather, these days, one per week for the duration of the remote learning period, are designed to provide:

- students with an opportunity to catch up on previously assigned work or to get a head start on future assignments.
- teachers with an opportunity to design lessons, connect with students, collaborate with peers, and meet with administrators for the purposes of planning for an instructional model that has never before been attempted on such a scale and in such a short amount of time.

Parents and teachers will learn more about flex day directly from their home schools. Look for this information, including how it may be utilized and when it will be scheduled, over the coming days.

**Grading and Assessment**—Given the closure of school beginning March 16<sup>th</sup> and the extension of remote learning through May 4<sup>th</sup> at least, the district was required to take action on a number of fronts:

- adjust schedules for quarter 3 and quarter 4
- redesign assessment/grading expectations
- redesign instructional schedules

This process of refinement is currently underway, the details of which will be communicated by your home schools in the coming days.

**Standardized Assessments**—Last Thursday, Education Commissioner Edelblut signed the waiver that allowed our state not to participate in the annual state assessment required by the federal Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). New Hampshire was the last state in the nation to sign this waiver, meaning that up until last week, in addition to planning for remote learning, educators and school administrators throughout our state were deep in planning for the remote administration of these state assessments. We are pleased to have joined the other 50 states in being able to focus our energies on remote learning for its duration. Additionally, the May 2<sup>nd</sup> administration of the SAT has been canceled-no more information available at this time. And finally, AP exams are currently scheduled as before. Any updates to that status are likely to be communicated to students directly from the College Board.

**April 6, 2020 Planned School Board Meeting**—Given the nature of the times, regularly scheduled board meetings will need to give way to meetings as necessary to address the current crisis and related impacts. For that reason, and because of the urgency of events over the past week or so, it was necessary to move up our board meeting date to last night to accomplish several goals. Therefore, the school board meeting, regularly scheduled for April 6, 2020, has been canceled. We will certainly update the community concerning the date and time of the next school board meeting.

In one sense, the initial crisis has now passed. The tension and uncertainty of the initial start up of remote learning has begun to give way to adjustments to a new reality that will last at least until May 4<sup>th</sup> and, quite likely, much longer than that. It is hard to believe that only 14 school days ago our students were in their classrooms with their teachers. It seems so much longer. But the reality is that in a very short time everything changed, and we changed, and are still changing, with it. Given the enormity of that change I am inspired by all our students, parents, teachers, staff and administrators who have done so well with so much so quickly. Our achievements, however, are far from perfect. How could they be otherwise? But now that we have a bit more certainty about a minimum time frame for remote learning, we can move from crisis/mobilization to a more routinized response to our current reality. This evolution is happening every day and this week marks that period of transition from the necessarily reactive “what is happening?” to the appropriately proactive and productive “let’s get on with it.” And with continued patience for and with each other, we will do just that.

Stay well.

Mark McLaughlin  
Superintendent