

Dear Merrimack Families~

Greetings to you all on the first day of the third full week of remote learning in Merrimack. As you know, this was to have been the date of our return to school after a break due to the COVID-19 virus. However, circumstances changed and, as a result, pushed that possible return date to May 4<sup>th</sup>, and quite possibly later than that. Such is the nature of the times we're living in at the moment—a new day brings a new reality and a new set of decisions to be made.

Tonight I wish to share with you another decision that has been made necessary by the developing health emergency. As you know, since the very beginning of remote learning in Merrimack we have tried to achieve two goals—maintain the functions of schooling while simultaneously maintaining staff and student safety. First, this was achieved by allowing staff the option to work either from school or from home as they wished and as their needs required. Second, this was achieved by creating the conditions necessary for those staff electing to work remotely to do so while maintaining, as best as the current conditions allow, our core instructional principles. As I have said so often, I am very proud of our dedicated staff who have worked so hard to accomplish these goals under these extraordinary and frequently unpredictable conditions. And so it is that change has come again, necessitated by the evolving circumstances of this health emergency. Effective at 4 PM on Wednesday, April 8<sup>th</sup>, every school building in the district will be closed until further notice. Despite the continued assurance by state authorities that it is still permissible to work from school during this emergency we take the position that given the uncertainty of the next few weeks now is the right time to fully convert to remote operations.

Communication about the details of this conversion to fully remote operations will be conveyed to staff by their school leadership over the next few days. However, in summary what this means is that over the next two days all staff will be asked to retrieve from their classrooms or workspaces whatever personal or professional materials they wish to have with them until at least May 4<sup>th</sup>. Additionally, it means that calls to your school's office may not be answered live, as is our normal practice, even now. This practice may, for a time, be replaced by a request for you to leave a message coupled with an assurance that the message will be returned as promptly as possible. Beyond that, it is very likely that you will not notice much change in functionality since we have been transitioning to remote operations already over the last few weeks. Make no mistake—even though our school buildings will now be closed the education and business functions of our school district are functional and fully operational, just as they have been since the beginning of this emergency. We will of course continue to support the needs of all of our learners and their families, as before, and we encourage you to seek the guidance of your child's teacher(s) or administrator(s) if your needs are in any way impacted by the full time closure of our school buildings. Just like always, your schools are here for you, ready to teach and help however they can.

Toward that end, I want to close tonight by thanking three groups whose work is vital to our efforts all the time, and never more than right now. Our food service staff, who just today prepared 268 lunches, have now prepared well over 3000 lunches to our Merrimack families since the beginning of this emergency. Their efficient, funny and incredibly positive work has boosted many spirits throughout this emergency, and we are grateful for their continued support of our lunch program throughout this emergency. This program will continue since they cannot do this work remotely and they are providing an invaluable service to our community. We continue to monitor their safety and use of all appropriate protocols as they continue to deliver this invaluable service. Our bus drivers, too, have been incredibly helpful in delivering lunches to those who cannot come to our high school lunch pick up location. They have also been essential in ensuring that students unable to pick up their learning/instruction packets at their home school still receive them by virtue of

home delivery. Those two functions alone have ensured that the needs of our students and their families are being met during this difficult time. This program will likewise continue and we will continue to partner with STA, the bus company, to address the proper conditions for this work as well. Finally, our custodians perform vital tasks every day, some of which we can see, and some of which we cannot see, but all of which is essential to the operations of our schools. During this period of remote learning our custodians have been working to maintain clean and sanitized buildings for our staff. They continue to engage in all the maintenance work that ensures that our greatest assets, our buildings, are carefully and appropriately maintained. Our school buildings are meticulous at all times of the year, and the work to keep them so is on-going. Our custodians also provide an additional service during this period of remote learning, when far fewer people are populating our buildings; their presence allows them to monitor emergencies like water or gas leaks or threats to building security, among other things. Their work will also continue since they too cannot perform their functions remotely. However, our hope is that by further limiting the access of personnel to our buildings these incredibly important partners in the totality of our district operations will be enabled to even more safely perform their duties.

We have literally never seen times like these before. But we must face them, and adapt to them, as the needs arise. Today's announcement is just another step in that process. Thank you.

Stay well.

Mark McLaughlin  
Superintendent