

Dear Merrimack Families~

As you know from last night's message, tomorrow at 4 PM our school district buildings will shut down until further notice. However, I want to be clear that remote instruction will carry on as before, improving daily as much as current conditions allow. So while our school buildings will be closed, our school district remains up and running as before. Over the last few weeks in order to accomplish this goal of remote learning, our district, and many school districts across the country and beyond, have used the platform Zoom to reach students, share work, maintain and build relationships, and to just plain stay in touch. It has proven a very valuable tool in this environment. However, you may have read recently that bad actors, working outside the school environment, have recently begun to hack Zoom sessions (Zoom Bombing) and, in some instances, have introduced completely unacceptable material into an otherwise positive learning environment. We have learned, through guidance provided from sources as varied as our own technology staff, Zoom security briefers and the FBI that the screen share option of Zoom exposes the vulnerability necessary for hackers to interfere with the legitimate use of Zoom. These behaviors are as inconceivable as they are despicable, particularly given the significant limitations that teachers, students and parents are already working under as a result of the virus. However, just like the virus, we will have to work around this too.

Therefore, in light of these developments we wish to share that the district has developed revised guidelines for the use of Zoom that educators and all staff using Zoom as an educational tool are now required to implement. These guidelines are informed by Zoom security and enhanced by guidance from federal authorities. In addition to these measures, administrators will continue to do virtual walkthroughs for Zoom sessions occurring with their teachers and students. Beyond ensuring we are providing a safe virtual environment, this gives our administrators an opportunity to check in with students and to see the amazing learning opportunities that continue to be part of the Merrimack School District.

While we have arrived at these guidelines in accordance with current security needs, the district will remain vigilant to changes or additional threats. ANY incidence of Zoom Bombing or hacking occurring from outside the district should be reported immediately to support@sau26.org.

COVID-19 and its impacts have made our world very small and a little frightening at times, and I am so sorry for all that is happening as a result. But I feel as though we have entered a new phase where the novelty of this situation has given way to some harsh realities, and we must now meet those realities with one goal-to protect our students and staff as much as we can while trying, still, to maintain our goal of providing the best remote instruction we can under circumstances that are almost entirely beyond our control. We continue to adjust as necessary to the daily changes forced upon us by circumstance and we appreciate the collective patience of students, parents and staff as we do so.

Stay well.

Mark McLaughlin
Superintendent