

Dear Merrimack Families~

The beautiful weather these last few days are welcome signs that spring is beginning to take hold in New Hampshire. After all that we have been through over the last six weeks or so this is a nice reminder of better days ahead. With spring in full swing, summer is not far behind. This year, due to the health emergency, our school district has opted to count instructional hours rather than instructional days in determining the last day of school. Having calculated instructional hours according to state guidelines we were able to announce at last night's school board meeting that the last day of school for this academic year, and the unofficial start of summer in the Merrimack School District, will be Friday, May 29th. Now that this date has been determined, we can focus on the work that remains for all of us in the weeks to come.

From the very beginning of this crisis, we have emphasized three different but related points. The first is that we will do our best to provide the best education to our students we can given the limitations imposed upon us by the remote learning environment. The second point we have tried to emphasize is that try as we might, we cannot fully recreate the educational experience that exists in our schools, in that person to person transaction that makes our work so unique and so important. To be sure, some students are actually thriving in this new remote learning environment, and we are learning important lessons about how we must continue to create the conditions for that kind of success even after the time comes that we are not required to do so. If it is right for students, we will work hard to provide it. For other students, this remote learning environment has not been as positive. There are many reasons for this, all of which are valid and understandable given the immense pressure that this crisis has placed on so many of our students and their families. We will continue to partner with those students for the rest of this school year, through the summer, and through next year to support them to regain their footing once this crisis has passed, whenever that may be. And then there are students whose experience in remote learning has been neutral, neither terrible nor outstanding. For those students, we believe that there is still more we can do to remediate or extend their academic experience when we have the opportunity to more fully evaluate the totality of the experience of remote learning on all our students. In all cases, this process of evaluation has already begun and will continue into the foreseeable future. Our district has always worked hard to reflect on its successes and to learn from its failures, and now, given the impact of this health emergency on school and district operations, and on all our lives, that evaluation is more important than ever. The third point we have tried to emphasize since the beginning of this crisis is that whether or not we could make this experience positive, negative or neutral for our students, our efforts at continuing to provide educational opportunities have included one important additional goal; providing and maintaining routine and laying the ground work for a successful return to school, whenever that may be and however that may look.

From today until the end of this school year, now with a date certain, our job is to continue to teach as best we can, given all the limitations we face in doing so optimally. The job for our students continues to be to learn as best they can given the countless ways they have experienced and responded to this crisis under conditions that can neither be fully known, fully understood, nor fully controlled. But the routines of teaching and learning can and must be maintained right up to the end of this school year with an eye toward being as well prepared as possible for a return to school or whatever lies next on the learning journey. Summer will come soon enough, and with it a chance to recover and refresh from the unprecedented challenges of this extraordinary school year. But in the meantime there is work to do and the challenge now is to be sure we do it, all of us, with as much determination and drive as we can summon.

Stay well.

Mark McLaughlin
Superintendent