

April 6, 2020

Dear Families,

One month ago at this time, we had no idea that we would be living with this current reality in Region One. At the same time that we try every day to reconcile ourselves with what we are facing, I can say that our staff in our schools are doing an amazing job of doing all they can to support students and families. Everyone has stepped up, shown a willingness to try new things, reaching out to families and students in new ways, and going the extra mile.

As of April 6, we are beginning Week 4 of Distance Learning and everyone is becoming more comfortable with the online platforms and the amount of academic work that is doable for our students. We are very proud of the teachers, paraeducators, and support services staff, for their willingness to try different ways to teach virtually.

We were not certain that we had full time work for our support staff, but knew our employees needed their full pay, particularly now. Knowing that we could ascertain work for all of our staff, not just custodians, secretaries, and food service, but also paraeducators to support teachers, we had a number of meetings to plan. This has been an adjustment for many paraeducators who were accustomed to working with students face to face; however, we are hearing from teachers and principals that they are communicating with their paras and that everyone- teachers and families alike are appreciative of the assistance paras provide their students.

Our administrative meetings are being held regularly online. We are now adding sessions for the staff who support students in special education to be able to meet as a group to confer and determine how we can best serve our students with special learning needs.

Our meal service has been a tremendous way to stay connected to families and to provide another resource they greatly need. This "Emergency School Closure" program is for any family with children who resides in our school districts. We have adjusted the staff numbers preparing the food, as well as those who have helped with deliveries. We owe a great thanks to the community agencies in Cornwall for their provision of food for many families there and to the White Hart Restaurant in Salisbury who contacted me on day one, to ask how they could help provide meals. And now, we have the tremendous support of Berkshire Taconic to help families with food needs over the spring break. The support from the communities has been extraordinary. We have received a tremendous amount of positive feedback and gratitude from families receiving these meals.

The cleanliness and safety of our buildings has never been more important. Custodians continue to work in our buildings, cleaning and doing maintenance jobs. They ensure that all the areas are disinfected, particularly the areas used more frequently, such as office and kitchen areas.

We have been clear that the only persons to be in the school are food service and custodial and maintenance employees. At times, those who do payroll, accounts payable and provide information technology are the exception. And all of these individuals know the importance of maintaining

social distance and communicating that the custodial staff disinfect their work areas. Beginning April 6, we are requiring all staff who are in schools to wear masks for everyone's safety. We encourage all of our staff to use best judgment, as their health and safety is of the highest importance.

We will continue to pay our school staff employed by the local or regional boards of education. This includes teachers, paraprofessionals and other support staff, cafeteria staff, clerical staff, custodial workers, and others. The decision to pay our support staff in full, while asking staff to work half time, was made so that we would not lose the services our schools require, at the same time realizing that the work load has been reduced with students at home. We also want to be sensitive to the needs our staff members who need their full pay and also must adjust to all of the routines when working in a quarantined environment.

Finally, we know how much all of our employees have been doing these past several weeks. We value all of our employees and know that this is a difficult time for everyone. Their commitment and dedication to doing their very best is exceptional. For the spring break, we will close down the schools and ask that all staff stay home and find time for relaxation and peace. Everyone who would normally be paid for their work time will continue to be paid.

We frequently are asked the question about a date when school may reconvene. We have no answer to this, as everything depends upon the numbers for Coronavirus in our state. All of the country is asking the same questions about when life will begin to get back to normal, but is truly impossible for anyone to know. As we listen to the news, we will know when things begin to change. In the meantime, the most important thing for all of us to do is to wear masks when we are out, follow social distancing, stay in our homes as much as we can, thoroughly and frequently wash our hands, take caution with boxes and bags and things we bring into our homes, and following all of the guidelines that the Center for Disease Control and Dr. Fauci tell us we must do. We will know if the virus worsens here in our area to the point where we tell all employees to stay home. We are watching the news very closely and will follow the directions of Governor Lamont and our health agencies.

It is important for our communities to know how much we thank the all of our staff for striving to see that the education and care of our students continues. We thank the Board of Education members, as well, for their ongoing support. We share the same goals—to see that our students are engaged and appreciating time to learn in new ways, and that our staff all understand that each person we employ has a vital role in making our schools vital to those we serve. And most of all, that we keep everyone safe.

Together as a school community, we will get through these difficult times.

Dr. Pam Vogel