

March 27, 2020

Dear Parents,

We are ending Week 2 of PPS Remote Learning. Thank you for the photos, the appreciation, and the helpful feedback. Your positive responses are affirming the truly amazing work our PK-12 faculty is doing to translate their teaching expertise into effective distance learning. We appreciate you as well for doing your best to carve out space and time in your work and home life to support your children's learning.

We are working to get it right — the workload, an appropriate amount of synchronous versus asynchronous time with students, the expectations for learning, and a balance of work time, down time, play time, and family time. To that end, and for consistency across schools and grade levels, we are asking teachers to consider a few **key principles** as they plan their remote lessons, keeping in mind that their professional judgment and their knowledge of their students should drive their decisions.

Teachers will:

- **Focus on core skills, not simply content coverage.** This means that while we are attempting to move students along with curriculum goals, we know that nothing fully replaces what is done in the classroom. Lessons will be pared down, along with time and product expectations for students.
- **Present lessons in a way that allows students access throughout the day.** For families, this means students can watch videoed lessons or complete assignments when it is most convenient for them and their parents. Remote learning may be more effective when students participate live with their teacher, but we know it may not be possible for every student to tune in on any given day or time. Do what works best for your family.
- **Provide clear directions.** This is something we're learning day by day as we receive feedback from students and parents. If you have questions, use the teacher's school email address or the PSL platform to ask. Don't panic if you don't receive an immediate answer; due dates are flexible.
- **Assign "classwork" only, with no additional traditional "homework".** We know students take varying amounts of time to complete assignments, be it in class or at home. Teachers will adjust the quantity and type of work they are assigning as they assess student work and progress. Flexibility along with compassion for everyone's life situation is key for us. While we do need your help to provide encouragement and an environment conducive to learning in your home, we do not expect you to teach the course or curriculum.
- **Use live chats or recorded lessons when appropriate.** If students are unable to attend the live session, they can watch the video when it is more convenient for the family. At times, a teacher may want to also meet with small groups of students. In that case, if possible, it would be helpful if you can arrange for your child to have a computer device available to them at the scheduled time.

Note: We are as close to certain as we can be that all of our students who are income eligible have a district-issued device. We know there may be further need for students who don't quite meet that criteria. If you know of a student who needs a device, please email the school principal.

- **Use PowerSchool Learning (PSL) as the starting point for all lessons.** Links to other platforms like Google Classroom and Microsoft Teams will be found there.

Note: PowerSchool Learning was slow for a few days last week. They believe they've resolved the freezing issue; we will be monitoring it carefully day to day.

- **Teach and communicate with compassion and flexibility.** This is perhaps most important as we know significant physical, emotional, and financial strain are new realities for our families.

Over the last two weeks, parents and students have expressed appreciation for the creative ways teachers are engaging students through activities like virtual Morning Meetings, small and large group chats, live and videoed lessons, story "hours", posting funny motivational videos, spirit days like Crazy Hat day, and teaching in a Google Hangout. Principals and supervisors are also staying connected to students using district online platforms and social media to send messages, songs, magic tricks, and daily food for thought, along with weekly updates to parents.

We do know that learning is most effective when it is a social experience, and our teachers and administrators are striving to maintain social interaction despite mandated social distancing.

We are so very grateful to our teachers for creating positive remote learning environments with instruction and guidance that is appropriate to the age and grade of their students. With that, we are especially grateful to parents. We know that balancing work, family, and school isn't easy for anyone.

A Note about Special Education and Related Services: Teachers, Child Study Teams and related Service Providers have been reaching out to families to determine how to best support students and their families. They are reviewing initial plans, listening to parent feedback, and determining how to best provide services remotely without overwhelming families. Team members are working to engage families in either virtual meetings or phone conferences, with translators available as needed. If your child has an IEP, we encourage you to participate in these meetings. We recognize how challenging each day can be and setting clear expectations can help alleviate worry and stress. Always feel free to call or email your child's case manager or teacher as well should you have questions.

A Note about State Testing: All Spring 2020 State assessments have been canceled, which include the New Jersey Student Learning Assessments (NJSLA) for grades 3 - 11, the Assessing Comprehension and Communication in English State-to-State (ACCESS) tests for English Language Learners, and the Dynamic Learning Map Assessments (DLM). The NJ Department of Education will provide school districts with further guidelines as they consider impact and

unintended consequences of this action. Cancellation of these statewide assessments will not prevent students from meeting their graduation assessment requirements.

With sincere appreciation for this wonderful village we are all a part of,

Annie

Anna Gonzalez Kosek

Assistant Superintendent, Curriculum & Instruction