



BEN STEELE MIDDLE SCHOOL

5640 Grand Avenue
Billings, MT 59106
Phone - 406.601.1600 Fax - 406.652.3228
www.bensteelems.com

Joe M. Halligan – Principal

Angie Gray – Associate Principal

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RE: School Closures/Ongoing Education

Dear Wildcat Parents and Families,

This event, and the related school closures, is something that we will all remember for a long time. While we are in the midst of it, it is important to remember that, not long from now, it will be in our rearview mirror, and we will be able to return to a life that resembles what we knew before Covid-19. We hope this letter finds you all well, and doing what you can to make the most of a difficult situation. Please know that our thoughts are with you and your kids, and we do miss them.

As we transition from the Tier 1 closure into the Tier 2 closure, which has been designated as March 30th through April 10th, there are a few things we wanted to make you aware of in terms of our expectations moving forward. Our number one goal, since the announcement to close schools was made on March 15th, has been to ensure that our teachers and staff communicate with each one of you, and your student by phone, email, Google Classroom or any other means of appropriate communication. We have offered Chromebooks to any student needing a device at home to access their online learning, and to date, have given out over 200 for students to use during this unprecedented time. **If your Ben Steele student is in need of a Chromebook device, please contact us as soon as possible.**

At this time, we have no way of knowing if the closure will extend beyond April 10th, so please follow us on Facebook or on Instagram (@bensteelemiddleschool), or visit the district's or school's webpage for up to date information. <https://www.billingschools.org/our-schools/middle-schools/ben-steele>

As many of us are parents of school-aged children, we understand that this is a highly stressful time for you and your students, and our goal is to not add to that pressure and stress, but at the same time provide ongoing educational opportunities that are reasonable, realistic and relevant. Everyone is learning this process together, and certainly nobody has it figured out; there is no playbook for school closures due to pandemics. We are working daily to fine tune the delivery of instruction, and create a consistent framework from which to operate. Some of the components that we will implement starting on Monday are;

- Posting all assignments and materials needed by 9:00 AM. *Assignments may be posted prior to that, but we are asking our teachers to not post additional assignments/activities after 9:00 AM.
- Posting due dates for all assignments and projects at the time of posting. Your student may have work that is due daily, every few days or even weekly. Due dates will accompany all posts.
- Establishing an “online presence” or platform through which students can ask questions and receive necessary support throughout the week. This may happen through email, Google Classroom, Zoom or other approved platform.
- Work completed will be graded in order to provide feedback to students; Assignments may also be marked as “collected” or “missing”, but will not negatively impact any student's grade.

Our staff met virtually this last Friday morning to come together and agree to move forward with consistency, patience and understanding. As our district leadership team has navigated through the last couple of weeks, one of the “standards” that we have learned from the homeschool community, is that most students in a true homeschool setting only spend about 2 to 2.5 hours a day doing actual academic/book work. The rest of their time is spent doing things around the house, learning life skills, playing outdoors and going on field trips to learn things about the places around them. I think all of us would agree that we would prefer that our students not spend more time in front of a screen than is absolutely necessary! That said, we have asked our teachers to keep that standard in mind as they assign daily and weekly lessons and assignments. A good rule of thumb, for you as parents, is to encourage your kids (at the middle school level) to focus 25-30 minutes a day on each core subjects (English, Math, Science and Social Studies) and to spend around 60 minutes each week on their electives classes. If you are finding that your student is having to spend a great deal more time than the recommended, please reach out to their teachers.

Our focus for instruction, over the last couple of weeks, has been to review concepts previously taught in class prior to closure, or an extension of what was happening at the time of the closure. In Tier 2, teachers will begin to introduce new concepts, not previously taught, which may cause some angst on both the teacher’s and student’s part. For our teachers, it is difficult to not have the means to watch students respond to them during instruction, to read their facial expressions, and to address questions as hands are raised. For our students, it is equally difficult not to have their lifeline 4 or 5 feet away from them while they sit at their desk and take in new information. As mentioned earlier, this will require great patience and understanding from everyone involved, and we will do our best to support every student in any way.

If your student is one who has opted not to engage in the digital classroom, or has done very little, we would ask that you continue to encourage them and spur them on to stay up with what is happening in their virtual learning environment. It may not be easy, but we all know that parenting is not for the faint of heart. Our hope is that every Ben Steele student would make an effort to stay connected as best they can, but we know that there will be some whose learning will suffer during this closure, and we are working on ways that we can support them upon our return to school. In the meantime, your involvement as a parent means the world to us as we know that you have many other things pressing in on you during this time. We are in this together, so please reach out to us if there is anything we can do to further support you or your Wildcat student.

Lastly, we all hope this ends sooner rather than later, but stay positive! As Colin Powell once said, “Perpetual optimism is a force multiplier!” If we can find the silver lining throughout all of this, our kids will follow our lead. Call the school, or email with any questions or concerns that you might have. Stay healthy, stay strong and we hope to see everyone back in the building soon.

Respectfully,

Joe M. Halligan
Principal
halliganj@billingssschools.org

Angie Gray
Associate Principal
graya@billingssschools.org