April 3, 2020

Dear Hastings Families,

I am pleased to share an update on the continuous learning program for all of our schools. Two and a half weeks ago, Governor Cuomo mandated that every school district establish a continuous learning program for students, a childcare service for first responders and medical professionals, and a meal program for families who participate in the free or reduced lunch program. The most challenging requirement has been developing and implementing the continuous learning program in a short period of time and without adequate preparation for our teachers. Nevertheless, teachers quickly adopted virtual learning practices that they may or may not have used previously while also creating assignments and identifying materials and resources for their classes to access in Google Classroom. We offer our deepest gratitude to teachers for ramping up quickly and embracing the challenges that lie ahead.

After the first few days of the extended closing, parents began to inquire about the use of video conferencing to engage students more dynamically and lessen the sense of isolation. While this was happening, behind the scenes, the Board of Education, Melissa Szymanski, Maureen Caraballo and I were working with Nate Morgan, President of the Hastings Teachers Association, to find common ground on what digital tools parents and students should expect to see teachers using across each school.

Today, the Hastings-on-Hudson School District and the Hastings Teachers Association signed an agreement that was approved at a 3:30pm emergency Board meeting. The agreement stipulates that teachers will provide live or recorded instruction/lessons to students at a minimum of two times per week for each subject or class, regardless of the letter day. Members of the Hastings Teachers Association may provide additional video instruction/lessons at their discretion, which many teachers are already doing. The agreement is here and on BoardDocs. I would like to thank the Hastings Teachers Association, the Board of Education, Melissa Szymanski and Maureen Caraballo for working together to find a solution to these new challenges brought on by COVID-19.

To ensure that families and students know what to expect, Melissa Szymanski worked with our administrators Lou Adipietro, Melissa Hardesty, Gail Kipper, Christopher Keogh, Amy Cazes, John DeKams, Laura Sullivan, Tesfa Stewart, Jeanette Kocur, Jesse Merchant to create a continuous learning guide which will be shared with families next week and uploaded to our website. If you have any questions about the guide, please contact your child’s principal or assistant principal for assistance.
To support parents, we are offering a *Home Help Hour* chat through Google Hangouts Meet facilitated by Lukman Ramsey of Google who is a parent of two children in the district. The objective of this *Home Help Hour* is to provide a forum for parents to exchange ideas and solve problems associated with virtual learning. The first chat will be April 16 from 4:30pm-5:30pm. We will post the link to Google Hangouts Meet on our website and email it to families. In addition, Melissa and I will continue the Superintendent’s Chats using Google Hangouts Meet to listen to concerns or suggestions from members of the community. These dates and the Google Hangouts Meet links will be emailed to you and available on our website.

On behalf of the Board of Education, thank you for your cooperation and understanding during these incredibly challenging times. Your feedback matters to us and is helping us. Together, we are committed to improving the learning experience for all children during this unfortunate extended school closing. We look forward to seeing the smiling faces of our students and hearing their voices. We truly miss them.

Warm regards,

Valerie Henning-Piedmonte