March 27, 2020

Dear Hastings Families,

Today, the Governor announced that schools will remain closed through April 15. School districts that used their emergency days and did not fall below the 180-day requirement may take their spring break. Thankfully, we did not exceed our three emergency days and therefore, will have spring break April 6-13. The continuous learning program, the childcare program at Hillside and the meal program will not operate during spring break. Provisions will be made in advance for families who use the meal program.

We realize that the disruption associated with COVID-19 has pushed many of you to your limits, nonetheless, I hope that you and your family are healthy and finding joyful moments throughout these days. There are community members who have tested positive for COVID-19 and are very ill. Because over time, many people will contract this virus, the Westchester Department of Health notified Superintendents that we are no longer required to notify the community when a child or staff member tests positive for the virus. This is not a good sign.

I spoke to a resident this week who is recovering at home from COVID-19. The person stated to me, “You don’t want to get this. This illness is terrible”. An email was shared with me today written by a resident who is a physician. The doctor reported that medical professionals are surrounded all day by people who are gravely ill as a result of contracting COVID-19. Social distancing may be an inconvenience but it prevents the spread of COVID-19 and can save lives. I have the deepest gratitude for our medical professionals and first responders who knowingly leave their homes daily to encounter people who are either carrying the virus and do not know it or people who are on ventilators or waiting to be placed on a ventilator. Please take this highly contagious virus seriously and do not let your guard down during these beautiful days when you want to go to the track or the fields for a stroll. It is better to be inconvenienced than to be gravely ill in the hospital.

Some parents and students have inquired about how report card grades will be determined. Student performance will be based upon what was taught up until the school closure, and not what would have been taught if we had a normal school year. Melissa Szymanski, Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction, worked with teachers and administrators to determine how to grade assignments in Google Classroom. A virtual learning guide will be presented to the Board at its meeting on March 30. The grading details specific to each school are outlined as well as what virtual learning looks like in each school. We will update this document as new information becomes available. At Monday night’s Board meeting, we will
review and discuss the progress of the virtual learning program in each school and how we are working to improve it.

We are grateful that a resident who works for Google is helping us to better leverage Google Classroom by employing other tools and resources to strengthen continuous learning for our students. Melissa Szymanski and I had a second conversation with this person today, along with a colleague, and were introduced to another Google learning suite that teachers and families can use. We will share more details after further discussions.

Laura Sullivan and Tesfa Stewart have been conducting CSE meetings using digital tools while also collaborating with special educators and related service providers to maintain the continuity of learning for students with disabilities. While we are still required to provide students with disabilities with a free and appropriate education, the New York State Education Department has made it clear that it will not look the same in the virtual learning environment as it would under normal circumstances. Laura and Tesfa shared an update today with families of students with disabilities. The letter is here. Please feel free to contact them if you have any questions.

If you are a parent of a high school senior, please let them know that I am continuing to record episodes of the Senior Moments podcast, which is a conversation with high school seniors who talk about what they have learned that may help other students, their worries, and wonders. If your high school senior would like to participate, they can email me at piedmontev@hohschools.org and I will arrange a GoToMeeting conference call or Google Hangout Meet. The first episode of Senior Moments was with high school seniors Jude Joerger, Avanthish Chen, and Kojo Sheng. The link to the podcast is below.

https://www.dropbox.com/s/q84f4lw4iqo5gbq/Senior%20Moments%20E1%20REV.mp3

Three other episodes will be available next week--episode 2 features Alex Weitzman, Daniel Goldberg, and Felix Spruck; episode 3 features Alle Jobe and Molly Furman; and episode 4 features Emmett Donovan, Ani Kessner, and Mikaela Cadenhead. Emmett, Ani, and Mikaela were recorded on Tuesday using Google Hangout Meet. This podcast will be uploaded to Anchor.FM and is automatically published on Apple Podcasts, Google, Spotify, five other platforms and our website.

While COVID-19 has a widespread impact on our lives, please don’t forget to pause to laugh and talk with your children about mundane things. A colleague of mine who recently retired had her students write down “I wonder” questions and place them in a jar. Once or twice per week, she gathered the children around her and pulled an “I wonder” question from the jar. I recalled her telling me how excited she and the students were as they read the question and discussed it. This might be a way to bring some mundane back into your lives.

Thank you for your patience, perseverance, and flexibility. Please know that if we can be of any assistance, don’t hesitate to contact us.

Warm regards,

Valerie Henning-Piedmonte