



WESTWOOD PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Honoring Tradition, Inspiring Excellence, Shaping the Future

EMILY J. PARKS
Superintendent of Schools

MARCH 25 UPDATE FOR FAMILIES

March 25, 2020

Dear Westwood Families:

I hope that you are all staying safe and healthy. Teachers have really enjoyed reconnecting with their classes this week! They've had some great stories to share about their interactions with students.

This afternoon, as we concluded day 3 of our two week remote learning plan, Governor Baker announced at a press conference that he is extending the statewide school closure until May 4th. Though clearly we had been contemplating the possibility of a longer closure, I learned about today's extension with everyone else when the governor made his announcement.

Thus far, the guidance that districts have received from the MA Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) is that during closure schools are to provide enrichment opportunities and learning activities for review, application, and extension of already learned material. We were advised that we should not provide instruction in new content. Clearly, this is a complex situation. While we have many students who are capable of completing assignments independently at home, we also have many students who require significant support in order to complete tasks and organize schoolwork. We are committed to providing continued learning for Westwood students. And, as a public school, we must also consider equity of access.

As Westwood developed its plan for this initial 2 week period, we were in communication with our colleagues in other districts. Based on my ongoing conversations with area superintendents in similar districts, I am confident that our plan is in alignment both with DESE's guidance and with the approach that other districts are taking. As superintendents, we have already been discussing the implications of an extended closure and how that may necessitate a different approach.

In Westwood, the feedback that we have received from families over the last couple of days reflects the variety of circumstances that people find themselves in. Some families have found the balance of structure and flexibility of a weekly learning plan to work well and have expressed amazement and appreciation for educators' ability to quickly transition to a totally new educational environment. Other families have expressed frustration that we aren't replicating the structure and expectations of a 6 ½ hour school day and holding virtual lessons and lectures. Still others have let us know that monitoring school work isn't possible for them as parents right now as they try to meet their work responsibilities from home or, in some cases, continue to report to their jobs in hospitals and health care facilities.

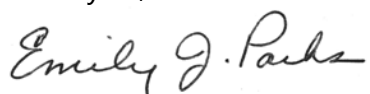
As the Governor and Education Commissioner Riley announced today, the Department of Elementary & Secondary Education (DESE) is developing educational programming guidelines to help students remain engaged in learning during this time out of school. I anticipate that with an extended closure, their guidance to districts may change. We will be thoughtfully reviewing the guidance that DESE shares with us as soon as we receive it and assessing how our plans may change as a result. The plans we have put in place for this week and next involve new structures and skills that can be adapted, as needed. We believe we are building a foundation that could allow us to move more fully into delivering instruction and content based on guidance from the state.

The Westwood Public Schools is an organization of more than 500 employees, now working remotely, like so many of you, from our guest bedrooms, dining room tables, and basements. Many of us have children and are experiencing this situation from our vantage point as parents, as well. We remain committed to our mission and committed to doing our best for students.

I understand that the next week or so may require some forbearance and that that is a particularly difficult "ask" when we are all dealing with so much change and uncertainty. We appreciate your willingness to work with us. I also want to make a public statement of my appreciation for our District's educators who place such primacy on the relationships they have with students and who go to great lengths to stay connected, create community, and provide a steady presence for kids.

Hang in there! Please keep encouraging your kids to stay engaged with their teachers. We will have more to share early next week.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Emily J. Parks".

Emily Parks
Superintendent