



ENGAGING AND CHALLENGING ALL STUDENTS

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Dear Parents and Guardians of Ellsworth School Department Students:

I hope this message finds you and your families safe, healthy, and well.

As we conclude the third week of the closure of our school facilities to instruction and all of us continue to adjust to the new realities, challenges, and pressures resulting from the evolving COVID-19 situation, I am expressing my appreciation to all of you for your continued patience, understanding, and support of our staff as they provide remote learning experiences and food service to our students. As we move forward, it is important that we all continue to abide by recommendations designed to prevent the spread of the virus and make every effort to take care of ourselves and our loved ones physically, emotionally, and spiritually and to access any and all available resources to support our families. Through the collective efforts of all, we will get through this situation together and emerge stronger.

This message is intended to provide you with updated information on the closure period, remote and distance learning, and food services.

School Closure Period

Included in Governor Mills' March 31 Stay Healthy at Home order was a mandate that schools continue to be closed for classroom instruction through May 1, 2020. Given the extension, we will continue with remote and distance learning and our food programs through that date. Over the next several weeks we will continue to monitor developments in the COVID-19 situation and rely on guidance from the Governor's Office, the CDC and the Maine DOE to determine if reopening schools on May 4, 2020 is possible.

Remote Learning

With the understanding that this is the first system-wide implementation of a remote learning program in the ESD, the first two weeks of remote learning activities have brought forth both positive experiences and several challenges for students and staff, many of which were included in my March 26, 2020 communication. Please be reminded that remote learning on this scale is a new experience, not only for students and families, but also for our teachers, support staff, and administrators. We recognize there are frustrations for students and staff and parents who feel overwhelmed by the combination of supporting their children in a new method of teaching and learning along with the challenges of Coronavirus situation. However, please know we have used feedback obtained over the past two weeks to prepare for the next two weeks of programming, and are making adjustments as necessary to improve the experience for all. We encourage you to remain positive and stress to your children the importance of remaining engaged in their learning. As noted in my March 26 letter, please do not hesitate to reach out to your child's building and other administrators and their teachers with any questions or concerns. Our intent is to learn from our experiences and provide the best remote learning program possible under the most

difficult and challenging of circumstances. Please know we will continue to work with you to support your children.

Remote learning activities in our Adult Education program, at EHS, and at HCTC will continue consistent with procedures used in the initial two-week period. Ongoing learning activities will be communicated to students through Zoom, Google Classroom, and other on-line platforms currently in use. For students currently unable to access their coursework over on-line platforms, work packets are being mailed. (HCTC mailed packets today. EHS will mail packets by April 9).

At EEMS, planning for the initial two-week learning period focused on activities designed to maintain student skill levels and limit regression. As the target end date for the initial closure period has been extended twice, we have decided to send laptops, Chromebooks, and iPads home so that new learning can be implemented into the remote learning program at those grade levels. Recognizing that remote learning for staff and students at this level represents a significant change in regular routines, administrators, teachers, and our Instructional Technology staff have developed a plan to prepare and distribute devices to students and provide staff and students with additional guidance on how to best use technology in a remote learning environment. Another factor influencing our decision to send devices home is that using an on-line platform provides opportunities for audio and visual contact between students and staff. This contact and communication is as important for our staff as it is for our students. We are planning to distribute devices and all other necessary learning materials to families the week of April 13 using the same pick-up process used to distribute learning packets previously distributed. Between now and that date, we ask that students and families continue working on the materials previously sent home and to extend as possible any related learning opportunities in the home. If students or parents have any questions, please contact either your child's classroom teacher or building administrator. EEMS teachers continue to use Zoom, See-Saw, and Google classroom as platforms.

A challenge that remains across all grade levels is that not all families have access to the internet. As announced in the March 26 letter, the MDOE is continuing to work on an initiative that will potentially provide internet access or internet-accessible devices to families without access. As we receive final details on this initiative, we will update families.

Food Services

The first week of our School Lunch pick-up program in the Reny's Department Store parking lot was a great success. Based on our eligibility for the MDOE School Lunch Summer Program, a summer component of the regular school lunch program, ESD Food Service and support staff prepared and distributed over 140 combined breakfast-lunch meals to families over a three-day period. We appreciate that families who accessed meals through this program followed established protocols and maintained the safety of all involved.

I am pleased to announce that the MDOE Nutrition program has received a waiver permitting us to make two changes to the program. We have been authorized to use Ellsworth High School as a distribution site and to implement a "bulk-distribution" model. Beginning Monday, families will pick-up meals at Ellsworth High School instead of at Reny's. The bulk distribution model permits us to distribute meals for multiple days to families rather than require daily pick-up of meals. This change will reduce the number of trips (and burden and gas expense) for families and reduce the number of times families will need to leave home. Beginning Monday, we ask families accessing meals through this program to come to Ellsworth High School and follow posted signs and directions from staff. On Monday and Tuesday, families will be able to pick up one combined breakfast and lunch meal per day. On Wednesday, families will pick up combined breakfast and lunch meals for Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday. So we are able to have an accurate headcount, families of ESD students interested in participating are asked to call the Ellsworth High School kitchen office at 667-4722, Extension 5525 by 8:30 a.m. each day you are planning to pick up a meal. Please provide the name and grade level of children who will be obtaining meals.

April Vacation Week

Please be reminded that we will be observing the scheduled April vacation week. There will be no remote learning program or meal service provided during vacation week. However, please know that while there will be no meal service during the week, we will be announcing plans to provide meals for the vacation period to families accessing our programs within the next week.

Stay Healthy at Home and Physical Distancing

We encourage all of you to abide by the parameters of Governor Mills' Stay Healthy at Home order and to continue practicing appropriate physical distancing measures designed to help flatten the curve and prevent the spread of the COVID-19 virus in our community. Each of us bears the responsibility to do our part for ourselves, our families, and for our fellow community members. Please stay home and only go out for essential reasons.

While this pandemic is a situation none of us envisioned and presents unexpected challenges, stresses, and anxieties, I encourage you to rely upon family and friends for support, remain positive, and practice kindness, compassion, and caring. As we do our best to be positive in face of difficulty and continue to come together as a community we will move forward together and be stronger in the future.

Thank you for your continued support and patience as we work together to take care of our students and community. Please stay safe, healthy, and well.

Warmest Regards,

Daniel A. Higgins
Superintendent of Schools