

March 25, 2020

Student Learning During School/District Closure

A Joint Statement on Shared Beliefs/Goals from the following districts:

Arlington Public Schools

Bedford Public Schools

Belmont Public Schools

Burlington Public Schools Lexington Public Schools

Melrose Public Schools

Reading Public Schools

Stoneham Public Schools

Wakefield Public Schools

Watertown Public Schools

Winchester Public Schools

Woburn Public Schools

As the Chief Child Advocates in our respective communities, we are coming together to focus on what is best for students in the coming months. We all believe that the initial three-week school closure will be extended. While this probable extension is creating many conversations about what learning should look like during this time away from the classroom, this vision of education will be best coming from those of us who work with children. Our shared belief is that, in future years when children reflect on this time in their lives, what they will remember most are the positive connections they felt at an uncertain time.

School is a special place - a sacred place. All of our communities stress that learning has its foundation in the relationships developed between learners and teachers, whether adults or children. There is no way to replicate this environment in a digital format in the middle of a pandemic over a week/month or two. We are deeply concerned about the physical and emotional health of everyone in our school communities. As such, we commit to planning and supporting learning that lessens stress and anxiety.

Part of this commitment means developing the skills and tools necessary to evolve and prioritize these relationships over the coming months. We are asking all of our educators to check in with their students. Many are already going far beyond connecting. They are doing incredible work untethered by current educational policy to ensure that students feel safe and remain connected to their learning. In our commitment to these relationships, new content and grades are not a priority at this time.

We recognize that there are countless challenges for identified learners who need specialized instruction and know that we will not be able to solve all of these challenges in the short term. As such, we will continue to focus on safety and connection while providing students with learning opportunities. Our biggest challenge in this effort is meeting the needs of our youngest students. The plan for these age groups is to focus on process skills, like observation and description, and to provide practice in key skill areas, like reading, to mitigate regression. These skills are an important objective of our content delivery with classroom instruction when school is in session. Much of our secondary curricular structure is already in place through a learning management system. Middle school and high school teachers will use this familiar tool to encourage critical and creative thinking skills.

Our school communities will continue to make connections, value relationships, develop learning skills, understand service and community, maintain health and wellbeing, and focus on a greater good. In remaining focused on the social and emotional needs of our students and offering learning experiences that support those needs, we believe that our students, your children, will be well served during this school closing.