

Superintendent's Message

April 16, 2020

Dear Parents and Closter Community,

Over the past month, our school community has participated in a major first: providing online instruction to students in Closter. We were all placed in this situation, in short order. Here are some of the things we have done in the past month:

- Finalized the Virtual Learning Day Plan;
- Posted Virtual Learning Day information to the district website; (<https://www.closterschools.org/Home#VirtualLearningDay>)
- Began providing virtual learning for students PreK through grade 8 on March 16, 2020;
- Conducted a survey of students, parents, and teaching staff at the conclusion of week one;
 - 599 responses (106 staff members, 148 parents, 345 students)
 - 88.4% of staff, 90% of parents, and 94.4% of students either strongly agreed, agreed or were neutral to the statement, "I am satisfied with the Closter Public School virtual learning days during the first week."
 - 95% of parents and 96% of students felt communication from district and teachers has been effective.
- Used survey data to revise our plan for week two and beyond, including increasing the use of video streaming to provide teacher instruction and opportunities for students to connect virtually with teachers and classmates;
- Conducted professional development sessions for teachers and staff using Zoom, Schoology advanced features, Screencastify, Go Math! online access, Seesaw, and Google Classroom; and provided teachers with access to online professional development offered through the Northern Valley Curriculum Center;
- Created the *Closter Cares Hotline* (201-256-3405) to assist parents and students with:
 - Questions regarding social/emotional issues relating to COVID-19 isolation,
 - Help organizing and scheduling a student's virtual learning day,
 - Behavior management techniques,
 - Referrals to outside Community Agencies, if necessary and
 - General wellness questions;
- Implemented *Feel Good Fridays* as part of the virtual learning day schedule; Every Friday, students now participate in special area content lessons (music, art, physical education, guidance lessons, etc.); the classroom teachers use this time for planning, providing feedback on student work, recording video lessons, and attending virtual faculty meetings or professional development;
- Created the *Guidance for Online Virtual Instruction During School Closures* document to provide consistent guidance for teachers in providing pre-recorded lessons and live drop-in sessions for students; this document includes step-by-step video directions for teachers to set up Zoom meeting rooms with every safety feature activated;
- Provided parents with information about our expectations for using online instruction and required their acknowledgement that parents may not participate in online instruction, will not audio-record or video-record the session, and will reinforce their child's obligation to adhere to and comply with all Board policies governing the use of technology during online instruction;

- Provided parents of students who receive related services with the opportunity to provide consent for having those services provided through an online virtual format;
- Communicated with teachers, parents and students regularly about the virtual learning day process (including email and video messages from principals and teachers);
- Provided Chromebooks to 50 students who needed a device for use at home;
- Teachers, school counselors and administrators have reached out to students who were not logging-in their attendance or were not completing assignments; we are formalizing support teams at both schools to provide daily or semi-weekly phone calls to support students who are not completing assignments;
- Delivered 19 days of virtual learning to students.

This has been a monumental shift in how we do our work. Has our process been perfect and stress-free? No! But together – students, parents, teachers, administrators and Board of Education – we can smooth whatever bumps we encounter. I want to applaud everyone for their dedication, perseverance, and great care in making the transition to virtual learning happen. It has been nothing short of extraordinary. We will continue to adjust and make improvements to our virtual learning days, for as long as this continues to be the way schools must operate.

The Governor announced earlier today that school buildings will remain closed through May 15, 2020. In the coming weeks, we will be increasing the amount of pre-recorded lessons created by our teachers, as well as the number of live drop-in sessions teachers have for students. Our administration team has been discussing and planning for how best to assess and grade students and how to have fourth grade moving up and eighth grade graduation in the event that school buildings remain closed through the end of this school year. We will share those plans if and when needed.

Our school district was pleased to donate personal protective equipment (PPE) to be used by Closter's first responders (police, firefighters, and ambulance corps). We gave gloves and masks that we had available in our school health offices. In addition, we lent two goggle-sterilization cabinets from our STEM labs so that the police and ambulance corps can sterilize the goggles and other PPE that they are using. The Closter first responders are always there for us and we are happy to assist them during this very challenging time.

As previously announced, the New Jersey Student Learning Assessments (formerly PARCC) have been cancelled for this year. This information was communicated to all parents via an email from me on March 25, 2020. In addition, there have been changes made to the teacher and administrator evaluation process, which I communicated to the Board trustees on April 7, 2020, and to teachers and administrators on April 12, 2020, when they returned from spring break.

As we continue to provide education to our students, in person or online, we remain committed to our shared core beliefs. In Closter Public Schools, we believe:

- all students can learn and thrive academically, socially and emotionally with support from staff, parents and peers;
- skilled, caring teachers are the most important variable in the classroom and we should consistently provide resources to assist them in life-long learning;
- instruction should be differentiated and culturally responsive to address students' learning styles;
- in a strong home-school-community connection and respect Closter's diversity;
- open and honest communication is vital to creating a positive environment for all; in the value of diversity and pledge to create a positive culture of equity, inclusion, and respect for all.