

Dear Parents,

I hope this email finds you well. I’m certain we all agree that this has been an extremely stressful time not to mention a historical moment in our lives. In this time of uncertainty, we can always find the positive side to any situation. In our case, it’s the fact that we are in this together. I am pleased to see that in this crisis we are witnessing collaboration, patience, and positive readiness from parents and teachers alike. I cannot stress enough how proud I am of our teachers and staff for literally working around the clock to transform an entire classroom curriculum with materials to online formats that can be shared with students. This is no easy feat and they continue to find ways to make this work. Please know that we are and will continue to be there to assist every family and child in our school community. At this point, I would like to update you regarding the present and future course of our scholastic endeavors. Please review the following information.

RETURN TO CLASSROOM (RE-OPENING DATE)

Although the school closure is scheduled until 3 April, the continued spread of this virus indicates a probable extension of the closure. Whatever the government’s decision, we will make the best of it and will be prepared to face the challenge for the duration of this crisis and even till the end of the scholastic year should this become necessary.

REPORT CARDS

In keeping with the school schedule as much as possible, report cards will be completed and accessible on Open Apply on April 9th. We realize that assessment of student progress will not be as accurate given the obvious variables of working online such as parent involvement, students collaboration, etc. However, student learning will be assessed as we normally would and we will continue to push student progress to meet our learning objectives and exam dates.

DETAILS REGARDING THE ONLINE LEARNING PROCESS

Although it feels like months since we’ve been home, since beginning on-line learning on March 9th, students have gotten better at using the Google Classroom platform and have become more familiar with downloading / uploading work and communicating with teachers and students in class. We will now continue to build on this momentum by increasing teacher contact time, increasing video lessons, and building the on-line resources students can use. Google Classroom will continue to be the main on-line platform for the school, with the exception of the early childhood division. All assignments, materials, and communication will continue to take place in Google Classroom. Teachers will begin to incorporate additional components to interface with the students such as Google Meets and Zoom. Students or parents will receive specific information from teachers outlining how they will implement this process.

Some teachers have already been providing video lessons, written notes, and learning materials to explain topics. They will continue to increase their video and audio lessons so that students (and parents) can access the lessons at any time convenient for them. This way, students can also pause lessons and review them as many times as they need to learn the material. The teacher will then meet with students during established times to clarify lessons, address questions, verify student knowledge, or simply visit with the class. Please be advised that teaching methodologies and class set-up will vary from teacher to teacher. This is “ok” and we should not expect everyone to be the same. Our ultimate goal is to ensure our students feel supported during this period and that the learning objectives are met.

PARENT CONCERNS

Some parents have voiced concerns that their children have lost their routine, will forget what they have learned, will lose their English, or will lose the school year altogether. On-line learning is not the same as learning in the classroom but this is a reality that the entire world is facing. We intend to conclude the school year strong and not simply give a passing score or just “getting through” the year.

LIVE CLASSES

It was also suggested that the school conduct live classes to follow the regular school schedule. I understand how this could seem like an easy solution. This was considered by the school as well. However, logistically this is not feasible for our community with siblings needing to use the computer for classes scheduled at the same time. This is further complicated because now parents, teachers and their families need the technology while working from home.

Regarding live classes with teacher lectures, how many of you remember your teachers lecturing to you in school? That’s how it was done years ago and this is how some schools have opted to teach during this crisis. I assure you however, this approach is not productive, especially in an on-line environment with large class sizes.

From an academic standpoint, our experience as professional educators and research has confirmed that one-way lecturing is not an effective learning methodology. This is especially true in virtual classes with 20-25 students trying to interact at once. Students cannot maintain their attention for multiple live classes and then be expected to continue working on-line to review lessons and complete homework and projects. We are also being mindful not to overwhelm students and their families by requiring them to spend hours in front of a screen.

In conclusion, although we value feedback, be reassured by the fact that we do not change our instructional path based on comparisons made with other classes, other schools, or parent opinions. We will continue to deliver our curriculum to the best of our abilities by building our video and audio lessons for students, by incorporating more teacher contact time, and by continuing to assign work in a balanced and creative manner. This is how we ensure that our students are supported, have less learning gaps, and will end the year as planned.

With your continued dedication and collaboration we will make it through this challenging time successfully as a united learning community.

I send my best to all,

Josephine Sessa