

April 9, 2020

Dear Parents and Staff,

Before we begin our holiday and well-deserved April break, I wanted to share some thoughts and reminders with you. For many, this time of year represents family, self-reflection, and faith. It is timely, then, that I make you aware of the kind gestures coming from within the Newtown community. These acts have continued to support our community, vulnerable populations, and those who are on the “front lines,” our emergency responders and hospital caregivers, both in our own backyard and beyond our borders.

### **Acts of Kindness**

The High School donated close to 200 goggles, 125 boxes of gloves, and other disinfectant products in its effort to support emergency personnel in Newtown. In addition, Lori Hoagland and Ryan Eberts, staff members at the High School, have used the Culinary classroom to provide meals for local hospitals. Coordinated through Erik Holst-Grubbe, Department Chair of BEAT, our 3D printer was donated for use to develop Personal Protective Equipment (PPE). Whitson’s staff continues to make and distribute lunches for families across our school district.

The PTA Presidents are also involved in helping to organize the creation of masks to help local hospitals. Parents in our district who are in the medical field reached out to us for support, and the PTA will be soliciting volunteers to create masks, which will be instrumental in protecting medical personnel as they respond to COVID-19 patients. There are many other acts of kindness – from residents shopping for elderly neighbors and others running errands for those in need. Thank you all for your support of one another at this critical time.

### **Reminders**

- April break is a time for everyone to de-stress, take a breath, and care for families. We hope everyone can fully “unplug” and enjoy some peace with families. No schoolwork will be assigned or expected from students at this time. Our teachers will not be responding to emails at this time.
- Please take the time to review the **Alternative Learning Plan** updates sent to you. Following the staff professional development time, teachers will begin to implement more interactive digital tools and approaches to support student learning.
- As part of our intention to include audio/video tools, **attached is the Distance Learning Participation, Confidentiality, and Opt-out letter for your review.** This aligns with our own BOE policy on the use of computer technology as we move to the use of video/audio digital tools. The BOE Policy P6141.32(a) can also be accessed via a link in the letter.
- We will be discussing grading and the implications this has for students across our District. However, all districts are receiving guidance from the Commissioner of Education and will be participants in multiple State of CT Conference Calls with State officials and Superintendents across Connecticut. I will share updates with you at some point following April break.

## **School Website and Resources**

As our virtual learning resources expand, we will continue to post videos to support parents' and students' ability to access and utilize those resources. You will be receiving important updates from our Assistant Superintendent, Anne Uberti, very shortly. If you have missed a communication sent by me, these are up on our website as well.

Enjoy a restful holiday and April break with your families. Be well.

Dr. Lorrie Rodrigue, Superintendent

## Distance Learning Participation, Confidentiality, and “Opt Out” information

Dear Families,

First and foremost, we hope this email finds you, your family and loved ones safe, healthy, and in good spirits. During this unprecedented school closure and in accordance with [Policy P6141.321\(a\) Responsible Computer, Network and Internet Use](#), Newtown Public Schools continues to enhance learning and improve communication with students through digital resources and remote instruction. Integral to our policy is the expectation that students, staff, and families will “...exercise appropriate personal responsibility in their use of these resources” as digital citizens in our school community.

Newtown Public Schools is committed to providing instruction, to the greatest extent possible, that further develops and expands digital learning approaches while maintaining “...the most effective, safe, productive, and instructionally sound uses of networked information and communication tools.” As part of our Alternative Learning Plan, students will begin engaging in lessons and receiving support through video, audio, or teleconferencing. During this time, parents and guardians may see, hear, or be exposed to confidential, personally identifiable information about students other than their own child if students are engaged in small group instruction. Parents are reminded that all Newtown Board of Education policies continue to apply during implementation of the Alternative Learning Plan.

In an effort to maintain student privacy, we ask that all families and students agree to the following:

1. To whatever extent possible, make arrangements for students to participate in video or teleconferencing lessons in a private space where, other than reasonable supervision by a parent/guardian, no other individual has access to or is present during the period of instruction. Encourage student use of headphones or earbuds, if possible.
2. Parents and guardians who may be present during small group video instruction agree to respect the confidentiality of personally identifiable information related to students other than their own children.
3. Parents and guardians should not disclose information concerning other students or their families that may have been incidentally discovered during any remote instruction or support session.
4. Electronic recording or video/audio taping by parents, guardians, or students during instruction, support sessions, or conferencing is not permitted, unless otherwise required by law and with written permission of the administration.

5. Interactive video conferencing is intended to provide students with a classroom experience, to the extent possible under the circumstances. While parents/guardians may provide supervision and assistance, as necessary, to allow their children to access this service, parents are not permitted to engage in classroom interactions or disrupt the virtual classroom environment. School staff reserves the right to terminate an individual student's video conferencing session in the event a parent causes a disruption to the educational environment. In that case, the student will be provided with an alternative learning opportunity determined by the school. Parents further understand that all codes of student conduct, relevant school rules, and the Board's Student Discipline policy continue to apply during the period of distance learning and students are expected to comply with these rules during virtual classroom instruction.

Adhering to the expectations outlined above will demonstrate that you and your children recognize, respect, and support student confidentiality and promote the success of the remote educational opportunities currently being provided by staff at Newtown Public Schools. In alignment with our policy, the use of technologies relies on "responsible and ethical conduct" for each and every user. Please be sure you familiarize yourself with the entire *Responsible Computer, Network and Internet Use* policy (link above). ***If you do not wish for your child to participate in any live, individual, or group instruction, please reply to the building principal with a brief note to opt-out.***