

April 20, 2020

Hello GFB Families,

As we await definitive guidance from either the Governor or Commissioner of Education, the lack of certainty about when we will be returning to school has risen to the top of the list of challenges. This uncertainty creates havoc in every household and of course interferes with our ability to plan with an eye towards the future. It has a tremendous influence on both our approach to engaging students and the goals of our instruction. Until otherwise advised however we will continue to focus on reinforcing skills already taught this school year and applying and deepening these skills.

The daily learning activities as well as communication with teachers are both important in keeping students connected to life as they know it. Predictability, consistency and certainty matter. They are the essentials that give us all a sense of calm and control. As adults we can process and digest when those three elements are unexpectedly interrupted because life and life's experiences has taught us that. Our students have not lived enough life yet to intuitively make sense of and adapt to abrupt changes. It is for this reason that families need to take seriously the job of maintaining consistency and structure in their child's day.

I've had plenty of time to examine the essentials of what our brick and mortar experience offers students. To me these essentials are: relationships, routine and environment. Families have been working hard to recreate these essentials for their students. For our part we have worked hard to consider how we can continue to offer those essentials, in a different way of course, and meet the needs of our students during this very challenging time. We have developed activities that keep students connected to learning and engaged with independent learning daily. We have integrated supportive guidance and are available to provide feedback to students and parents as requested to further assist in learning. Outreach by teachers to students collectively to help maintain connections with their classroom families are happening regularly. Teachers are also reaching out to students individually to let them know that their efforts with Lexia and other learning platforms are being noticed. Videos to keep faces familiar and keep school expectations around conduct and learning familiar are being sent and will continue to be sent regularly. And Fort Reports have provided guidance around establishing schedules, maintaining routines and have offered suggestions for deeper learning conversations. Hopefully families are taking advantage of our efforts and feeling better able to work with and support their student.

The reality is that being in school is the routine that we have all come to count on. It is the time that our world has cut out for learning. As such there is no need for families to have to prioritize home-work obligations, dedicate focused time to both understanding what and how students learn or dedicate any effort into getting students to work. It's no wonder families are wondering how to juggle. Managing these challenges is new and anxiety-provoking for families.

We are sensitive to the number of challenges parents/guardians are experiencing and very mindful that these challenges look different in each of our homes. Financial challenges to

securing basic needs, multiple students sharing technology devices, carving out time for parents/guardians to work from home, getting students started each day and holding students accountable for engaging in the activities are unwelcomed changes. The daily learning activities and experiences we are providing are intended to be flexible and for the most part, designed for independent student engagement. They allow you to create whatever structure and schedule is right for you and your child. Frankly it's less about how you keep your child engaged and far more about ensuring that your child is engaged on a daily basis.

Students should be working on the student daily activities in all areas posted, including specials. The experiences we afford students during the school day are well rounded. They are intended to activate different parts of the brain and prompt the integration of many skills and thinking processes. There is a reason that the Dept. of Elementary and Secondary Education mandates instruction in and writes curriculum for art, music, computer/technology and physical education. Although at the present time we are not providing explicit instruction to advance learning, it is imperative that we keep students right where we left them. The day will come, and hopefully soon, when we will have our students back in our building and we can continue to advance learning. But if students come back without the benefit of doing anything to maintain skills, we will spend more time than ideal reviewing old material and new learning will be delayed.

Yes, this is the week of April vacation and one where we have typically allowed students to take a break. NOT this year, please! Although teachers will not be initiating or responding to requests for communication, I have no doubt that they will continue to remotely log into the learning sites that allow for us to monitor student engagement. Families need to maintain their expectations for students given that their learning has had such a relaxed and unstructured approach. I have included a newsletter from the [Winthrop Parents Network](#) that has some great ideas and links for other supplemental activities just right for this week. Please, please, please...no breaks from our structured daily focus activities!

I hope you and those you care about are remaining safe and healthy. Have a wonderful week.

Your partner in education,
Ms. Pearson, Principal