

March 17, 2020

Dear ER9 Community:

The Easton, Redding and Region 9 Administrators, supported by our IT folks and office staff, are working with our teachers and paraprofessionals to put everything in place for transition to Remote Instruction and Distance Learning.

At the moment our plan is to re-open our virtual school programs on Monday, March 23. It might be that we will have to alter that date, but that is our intention at the moment.

I will write at greater length later today. For now, know that we are working on meeting our staff and faculty's contractual needs so our valuable employees will be able to teach and work with our students. We are also working on technology solutions and addressing other concerns.

I am proud to let you know that I have heard a resounding, "We can do this!" from our community.

This email is to place context for a few we will be sending that will address aspects of this transition to virtual. Therefore, please check your in-boxes for message from Central Office or the Schools.

Together, we can do this!

Tom McMorran, Ed.D.

Superintendent

Easton, Redding and Region 9 School Districts

March 17, 2020

Dear ER9 Community:

Before I turn to briefing you on our Administrators' plans for moving toward remote instruction, please give me a minute to remind you ...

At Redding Elementary School, the motto is **Respect yourself, Respect each other, Respect the environment...**

At Samuel Staples Elementary School most kids have memorized the school song, which begins, **"Oh SSES you are the best ..."**

John Read Middle School has the watch words, **"Taking Care, of ourselves, of each other, of this place."**

Helen Keller Middle School takes PRIDE: **Perseverance, Respect, Integrity, Dynamic, Excellence.**

And Joel Barlow High School's guiding principle is **"Education is not the filling of a pail, but the lighting of a fire."**

I have walked these halls. I have seen this spirit.

I know you are eager to get the plans and understand this new phase of how to balance life, wellness, work and school. We will all need to collaborate and offer greater patience than the fast-pace of when things are humming along.

At the moment, our intention is to use Monday, March 23 as our return to school programming. We are working on what a day-in-the-life will look like and will be communicating with you throughout this week and this weekend. If it turns out we are not ready, we will strive for the next day. But, for the moment, let's try to make March 23 our target date.

Between now and then, we in the Administration will get the following organized:

1. The food service drive-by "grab and go" will start at Joel Barlow High School this Thursday. We sent an email specifically about this, but we will send another Wednesday.
2. We are working to facilitate technology needs to the greatest degree we can. None of our districts has been designed to be a one-to-one program, so we will ensure our staff and paraeducators who need laptops will be able to come pick them up, and we will provide to those families who have no hardware at home. You will receive this week a separate email about how to borrow Chromebooks. As good neighbors, we will again set up a 'drive by' and receive for as many Chromebooks as we can manage. Look for that email.

3. We are working with your teachers, the support staff, our custodians and our administrators to ensure that a day of remote instruction counts as a working day for them.

But, as with all families with children at home, as we work this out, we will need to be flexible. At this point, as we get organized, I humbly ask us all: Let's not make a desire for perfect clarity be the enemy of getting started.

When a great new ship is launched from its drydock, there is the crash of the champagne bottle followed by the grind and wobble as the ship slides into the water. A crash of waves and some rocking and then the ship comes up even keel. We can do that, too.

4. We are working to align our local public schools with the directives we are receiving from Hartford. As we get started, there will arise a number of questions about how to manage teaching from the side of the faculty as they do their best from home, while managing their families. Our plan is to use the current start and stop times we are all familiar with to frame our days.

But, we will not expect any child, even the teenagers, to sit at a laptop and grind through a school day. There will be flexibility and we will work it out. This is a huge, real-time problem for us to solve as a team. We will get started and adjust as common sense dictates.

5. I can see what started as an email about our status has shifted into one about how good people communicate and support each other, how they turn challenges into hope. Put a team of teachers onto a project, and they will pose a series of very practical questions; that's one of their strengths as educators. Their other strength is they care deeply about children, their own and their students. I know many have acutely missed their students and are eager to get back in touch.

We have given ourselves this week to work it out, and as you can tell from the news updates, we are seeing changes each day.

I am telling myself to pause, take deep breaths, and remember that so far we have been out of session for three days. I know it seems like months, and we will be out for another handful of days before we head into remote learning and distance instruction.

6. I thank the many parents who have reached out to offer food or materials to their neighbors. I suggest you turn to the towns' websites and coordinate with the food pantries run by our social workers.

Let me stop here at this point. But let me stop with gratitude for knowing and working with so many great people.

We can do this. It will take coordination and planning. And teamwork.

Tom McMorran, Ed.D.

Superintendent

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