

March 24, 2020

Hello, Friends and Families of ER9:

As our second day of Distance Learning draws to a close, please let me share a few observations. I promise to keep it short.

Last night the Governor indicated that schools will remain closed in Connecticut through April 20th. We must contemplate the closure being longer than that. The Boards of Education will be meeting on Monday evening (March 30) to decide what to do with the Spring Recess.

And now...

1. Please let your children know that the teachers who are communicating with them via email or chats might not engage in a lengthy exchange as they have to ration their time for all their students. This does not mean that students should refrain from contacting them; it might mean they get short responses that seek to address their concerns in a brief manner. Please help your children distinguish between brevity and lack of responsiveness.

2. We are in asynchronous instruction and learning at the present time. The teachers are expected to work within the framework of the regular schedule for a school day, and this means when the virtual busses roll away at the end of their day, we cannot expect them to hold lessons or respond to questions before the next work day. I am not holding the teachers to a rigid schedule, and I hope we are all seeking flexibility. It does mean that a student may not receive a response before the next school day.

3. My previous observation does not mean I expect the students to be up early. It will be up to each household to work out how to navigate, and on behalf of the teachers I can say they are all mindful that parents will be working from home while also helping their own children. That is, of course, what many of our teachers are doing as well.

4. And that leads me to ask for some understanding about the texts of messages. If something a teacher puts into an email seems different from what one might expect, then please give some space to the communication. It might be that without the context of the classroom a comment seems unclear. My advice is for the student (or parent of younger children) to seek clarification. In my work with the three Boards of Education, I have found the phrase, "Help me understand..." to be a good way to seek clarity.

Those of us who read Stephen Covey's Seven Habits of Highly Effective People will recall the maxim, "Seek to understand before being understood."

5. I used to teach Sunday School before my work as an administrator came to take so much of my time that I had to pull back from that service. The adults used to work hard to keep our

*barriers down* and our *boundaries up*. It is healthy, safe, and good decision-making to maintain personal boundaries. A teacher should divide her or his personal life from their working life. Teachers should have time away from their virtual desks to be parents and spouses. And the same is true for students and their families.

As we work collaboratively to navigate the digital barriers to Distance Learning, I have asked the teachers to maintain their personal boundaries. I ask the same of our students and their families.

If questions arise, please start at the level of the teacher with a "Help me understand..." and then move to the principals as necessary.

I have faith in our students and their teachers.

Tom McMorran, Ed.D.

Superintendent

Easton, Redding, and Region 9 School Districts