



March 23, 2020

Dear Exploris Community,

Today Governor Cooper extended the closure of all public schools in North Carolina through May 15, 2020. He acknowledged the incredible work done by our teachers to implement remote learning plans within days to support the education of our students. The Exploris School will continue to plan for a long-term remote digital learning instructional model to ensure our students continue to grow and thrive during this public health crisis. Exploris is deeply committed to the social and emotional health of your children as well as their academic growth. At this time of uncertainty, we acknowledge that the social and emotional health takes precedence to ensure their overall well-being. It is extremely important to talk with your children about how this transition is going for them and to ensure that they do not feel lonely and isolated.

Connecting virtually with their teachers and classmates allows your child to experience a sense of normalcy and routine which is critical at this time. We have added a COVID-19 resources tab on our website to support families and a counseling corner to assist with supports needed to talk with your children. There you will find resources and contacts to reach out to if your family should need any support. At this time, Governor Cooper has not issued a shelter in place in our homes so it is also important to encourage your children to play and get fresh air in the backyard. Please reach out to your child's crew teacher, school counselor, or a school administrator if your family needs any assistance.

Unfortunately, the extension of school closure also means that our incredible field experiences that teachers planned during this time will also be cancelled. Our teams are already working with each of the providers to arrange for refunds so that we can reimburse our families. It is extremely disappointing to our staff and we understand how disappointing this is for our students and families as well.

Many students and families are also wondering about grading and the end of year testing process. Exploris will continue to use a standards-based grading philosophy, with frequent teacher feedback to students, and an end of year achievement report. We will be discussing the best approach to facilitate end of year portfolio conferences and graduation, which will be dependent on the status of the public health crisis.

The North Carolina State Board of Education voted unanimously today to seek a one-year waiver from the U.S. Department of Education for federal student testing and accountability requirements for the 2019-20 school year because of school closures ordered to combat COVID-19. Under the federal Every Student Succeeds Act, all states are required to test students annually as an accountability measure of student and school performance.

U.S. Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos announced Friday that students impacted by school closures due to the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic can bypass standardized testing for the 2019-20 school year. The Department of Education said Friday it will grant a waiver to any state

that is unable to assess its students due to the ongoing national emergency, providing relief from federally mandated testing requirements for this school year.

The North Carolina tests that would be waived include end-of-grade tests in reading and math in grades 3 through 8, science tests in grades 5 and 8 and end-of-course tests in Math 1 and 3, biology and English 2. The waiver would also include the state's A-F school performance grades as well as a number of elements included in the state's School Report Cards.

In closing, I want to thank the entire Exploris community for your support. Although we are living through very uncertain times, I am confident that the COVID-19 health crisis will be tackled by incredibly bright medical professionals and scientists in the near future. As difficult as this has been, this public health crisis has transformed our educational capabilities in incredible ways. Our team has grown exponentially in the past two weeks as we adapted to meet this challenge. As a school community, we have come together for one another. Our community is living out our mission of "Empowering Learners to Improve our World". Learning about this disease will inspire future scientists and doctors that will tackle and solve the next public health crisis. I am profoundly grateful for the educators and families that make Exploris such an incredible learning community. We will get through this crisis together and will be an even stronger community after it is resolved. I wish you and your family health and happiness always.

All the best,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Ellie". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.