



April 23, 2020

Dear Exploris Families,

I hope this note finds you all healthy and safe surrounded by your loved ones. We have had a great deal of together time with our families and the novelty of online learning and not having school may be taking a toll on your children as they miss their friends, teachers, and school routines. It is important that we all continue to support one another as we navigate the upcoming months.

Today, Governor Cooper shared an important update on North Carolina's response to COVID-19 and extended the stay at home order until May 8, 2020. The importance of the availability of testing, tracing patients, and tracking trends in the data are measures that he is using to guide the phased in approach to re-open our state for business. The new normal may not be what we expect and we all need to be prepared for a gradual transition to ensure the safety and health of our community. Unfortunately, the Governor did not address the impact on schools today in his briefing as we had anticipated. At this time, schools are closed for in-person instruction until May 15, 2020. In response to a question, the Governor indicated that there would be another briefing update tomorrow to address the impact and plans for re-opening the public school systems.

As I plan for the remainder of the 2019-2020 school year, there are several updates that I wanted to share with you to address questions that may be lingering and minimize the uncertainty of our plans for the future. Establishing a clear focus will allow us to utilize our energy productively to meet the immediate academic, social, and emotional needs of our Exploris community.

Exploris Return to School Update

After careful evaluation of the available data on the benefits and risks associated with returning to school this year, I am recommending to the Board that we complete the 19-20 school year remotely utilizing the newly established online learning platforms, even if the state recommends that we return to in-person instruction. The second transition back at the end of the school year, if approved by the state, would incur additional lost learning time, require resetting of norms, expectations, and instructional processes with only a few weeks remaining in the school year.

The facilities available at Exploris would not allow us to implement social distancing. Creating an alternative schedule for students with such a short time to finish the year would reduce instructional opportunities for students and increase instructional plans needed by teachers to

accommodate both online and in-person instruction. I believe the health risks and instructional impacts outweigh the benefit of returning to in-person instruction for the remainder of the 19-20 school year. Out of an abundance of caution and concern for the health and well-being of all students and staff, I will be recommending an extension of our remote learning environment through the end of the 2019-2020 school year to our Board.

Team planning is underway to evaluate and consider alternative schedules for the fall in order to implement a safe return to school for the 2020-2021 school year. Additionally, the team will identify new procedures and structures that will be required to ensure that we maintain a safe school environment for all.

Social Emotional Wellness

The social and emotional well-being of our children is our top priority during these uncertain times. Please reach out to your child's crew teacher if your student is struggling and needs assistance. I also want to assure you that we do not want the online learning process to add any undue stress for you or your child. Our school counselor is available to your family to help support you with any social, emotional, or food nutrition needs that your family may have at this time. Resources are available to help provide needed supports for families that are struggling with challenges and adversity. It is also important to take care of yourselves so that you can be present and support your children. Remember to go outside and play together every day; it is a great stress reliever.

School Calendar and Remote Learning

We will continue to maintain our approved school calendar to ensure our students have the opportunity to participate in learning and connecting with their crew. Our remote learning environment will continue through the close of school on June 12, 2020 if approved by the Board on Tuesday. Teachers will continue to share weekly schedules and keep you apprised of any adjustments.

Attendance

Exploris is continuing to monitor student attendance to ensure that they are connecting to our school community and accessing the learning opportunities available. Attendance is not required to be reported to the state and missing class will not have any consequences during remote learning. We are monitoring attendance so that we can reach out to students and families that may not be connected to the learning platforms so that we can offer assistance and support.

Grading

The Department of Public Instruction has issued guidance on grading for schools because this situation has illuminated many inequities in access and education throughout districts in North Carolina. At Exploris, our teachers are providing feedback to students and parents on assignments while being flexible and sensitive to unique family living and learning situations. We have ensured that all students have technology to support their remote learning but recognize

that each family situation is unique and some students may not have the supports needed to be successful independently. It is critical that we are providing equitable access to our education plan and have guided our teachers to be flexible and understanding with any missing work.

Teachers will not implement any punitive measures for missed assignments or class meetings but will encourage all students to be fully engaged in the remote learning process. Maintaining routines and schedules is critically important for children during times of uncertainty. This is a challenging time for all of us and we are encouraging everyone to provide grace, patience, and flexibility. Please continue to encourage your child to be active learners but also recognize that they may be struggling to manage independently and may need to take a break at times.

Achievement Reports and Portfolios

The end of year achievement reports will be narrative comments highlighting student progress and growth. Specific grades for standards will not be measured. The leadership team and staff are collaborating to plan for the third trimester portfolios and for the 8th grade passage portfolio process in a remote environment. We will block off dedicated time for the portfolio process and suspend the online learning for a period of time to allow students to share their learning journey with their teacher and families, reflect on progress, and discuss next steps for continued growth.

Graduation

We are also planning a virtual graduation ceremony to celebrate and recognize the accomplishments of our 8th grade students. Our intention is to maintain as many graduation traditions as possible and showcase our students digitally during a virtual ceremony for all. Crew teachers will be discussing upcoming plans with students and the crews will be selecting their graduation speakers. Students will also be invited to create artwork for our program to commemorate their class. We understand and recognize how disappointing it is that we will not be able to celebrate graduation together in person. Therefore, we are planning some special surprises in addition to the virtual ceremony to recognize our graduates during this unprecedented time.

I hope these additional updates help clarify any school related uncertainty you may have. We will continue to navigate any new issues that develop and get through this together. Please feel free to reach out to your crew teacher, any member of the administrative support team, or directly to me if you have any follow up questions or need assistance in any way. Taking care of one another is the most important focus at this time. I wish you and your family good health and happiness.

All the best always,

Ellie

