March 24, 2020

Dear Families,

I hope you were able to enjoy spring break despite canceled plans and our current situation. I spent a lot of time with close family playing games, reading, completing puzzles, and getting outside to hike. The silver lining has been taking the time to focus on one another without packed schedules looming over our heads. I also understand, however, that many of us parents need to work too! I am writing this letter to address the many questions around what school looks like now, and how to balance your own work life with your child’s school life. The letter is long, but I ask that you please take the time to read it carefully.

There are plenty of funny jokes floating around about parents homeschooling their children, and believe me, I feel you! TPS teachers and administration are all hard at work designing a learning plan that challenges your children and allows opportunities for them to work and participate in 'class' independently. I want to take this opportunity to explain what this distance learning plan will look like, and offer up some tips on where there is the flexibility to make it work with your own family life.

***Distance Learning Expectations***

First and foremost, understand that distance learning is not an online replication of classroom instruction. It is a unique approach that requires balance. Your child's day should not look like an 8-hour homework session; that will cause stress and anxiety for both you and your children. Children recognize that something is amiss and are processing the situation in their own way. Many students are upset about not being able to return to school, and therefore we want to make this new learning experience as positive as it can be.

As we are a Pre-K-9th grade school, distance learning will look different depending on your child's age. Teachers will have scheduled instructional time, which will be consistent each week. All teachers will be holding an advisory/morning meeting two days a week.

* **5th-9th grade** core-content teachers will hold at least two synchronous video sessions a week, in conjunction with independent assignments. As students express comfort with the platforms and have found a balance to manage the workload, teachers will use their professional discretion to increase instructional time if needed.
* **PK-4th grade** teachers will design their synchronous learning based on the developmental needs of the children, and in-line with academic expectations. They will be running *scheduled* whole class video sessions in addition to small groups so that families can plan accordingly.
* **Schedules** will be crafted by the end of the week, and we will send them out as soon as they are complete.
* Outside of those specifically scheduled video sessions, **families can** **design their schedules** to fit their needs. Some students want to exercise in the morning, others want to do Art. We posted an example on our Instagram page if you want to check it out.

As we are putting together our distance learning plan, we are collaborating with peer independent schools. They are sharing that less is more; that digital learning is more exhausting than being in the classroom. Therefore, for now, we are planning to ease in and have students engaged in **2-4 hours of core academic instruction each day**. We will continue to evaluate and adjust as we move forward. We know many of you are concerned about academic progress but don't worry! It will look a little different, but we are still covering new content and assessing understanding.

Ms. Sweeney, Mr. Bennett, Mr. Tsilibes, Madame Vignola, and the music department are all working on designing learning plans as well. Some of these sessions will be live, while others will either be pre-recorded or pre-assigned. These are ways for students to have further learning opportunities throughout each day while balancing out the academic component. On our website, I posted some resources for cooking and physical activity, and I will continue to update it as we uncover more. If you find something you love, don't hesitate to share it!

***Next Steps***

* We are setting up school email addresses for our younger students; this will allow them to log in to various online learning platforms that teachers can manage virtually. You will receive your child's email information by Friday, and other login information over the next two weeks.
* We are also asking that you create a zoom account for your child using that **school email** address.
* Next week is intended for students and teachers to connect and work through any technological kinks they may face.
* Please look out for a **technology survey** coming out later today. We want to ensure all families are equipped to engage in distance learning and will provide tech materials where possible.
* A full schedule will begin on April 6th.

***General Recommendations***

* Have your child wake up at the same time each morning and get dressed in proper clothing (no uniforms require).
* Set a consistent lunchtime, and maybe even create a menu so that there aren’t any arguments over lunch options.
* Set up a constant learning environment so they can minimize distractions. Teachers are making lists of materials students need from the classroom, and we are determining the safest way for you to retrieve those items.
* Schedule activities around the academic time: art projects, science projects, cooking, puzzles, singing, music lessons, games (board games and digital educational games), facetime sessions with friends, calls to grandparents/grand-friends, letter writing, etc.

I hope this letter answers many of your questions and helps to frame what your days will look like moving forward. I will update you on the academic component of our programming as it continues to develop. I am happy to consult with any family that has questions or concerns about designing a schedule or distance learning in general.

If it's possible, use this time to connect with your children in ways you usually can't due to time constraints. I often hear, "Remember when we would just play outside all day and only come in for dinner?" Here is an opportunity to get outside, solve a big puzzle, cook together, sing and dance, and play games. These times are unsettling. We are all working to figure out what 'normal' looks like with children at home and careers to maintain.

We will miss the smiling faces each day and hearing joy and laughter in the hallways. We choose this profession because we love working with children and experiencing their 'ah-hah' moments as we teach. This situation is hard for all of us, but we are in it together. Take a deep breath and please ask questions, reach out with concerns, and share ideas. We ask for your patience as we learn together, and teachers welcome your, and your child's feedback on what is working and what is not. Without open communication, we will just be feeling frustrated, and there is enough hardship already.

We understand how difficult this time is for our students and all of you. We will continue to thrive as a community, despite the circumstances. Please don’t hesitate to reach out for any reason at all.

Warmest Regards,

Serena Mueller

Associate Head of School for Academics