



RIDGEFIELD PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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*Susie Da Silva, Ed.D.
Superintendent of Schools*

April 3, 2020

Dear Families,

I hope this email finds you well and healthy. It has been a busy first couple of days, and I am grateful for the warm welcome from staff, parents, and the community. All I am missing now are students! It won't feel quite like school until I have the opportunity to meet and greet with children- this is a part of the plan in the coming week.

As shared in my opening letter, I will communicate with you frequently, and most certainly as updates are available. This communication is likely to be a bit longer than typical but I wanted to be certain that information was not missed during the Superintendent's transition. I am hopeful the format allows you to skim for the needed information and doesn't require additional screen time as you transition to your weekend.

Thank you for your support at home and 'at school'. If there is anything we can do to assist you during this time, please do not hesitate to reach out.

Sincerely,

Susie

Susie Da Silva, Ed.D.

Superintendent of Schools

COVID-19 Update

School Reopening

On March 31, the Commissioner of Education, Dr. Cardona indicated that he has not made a decision as to whether or not schools will reopen this school year. Superintendents are expected to receive more guidance from the Commissioner at/or around April 10. We will continue to communicate information as we receive it.

Calendar

At the Board of Education meeting on March 25, 2020, the Board approved the following changes in the school calendar:

- **April 6 and April 7:** eLearning school will be in session
- **April 8:** eLearning school will be in session AM ONLY (staff will be involved in professional learning during the PM session)
- **April 9 and 10:** No eLearning school; Spring Recess

These changes offer students continuity of instruction and 178 instructional days.

At this time, June 17 is the last day of school for students and staff.

Early Release Day

In order for our educators to continue their professional learning, the District will maintain the “Early Release Day” on Thursday, April 16.

Lunch Program During School Closure Days

The District’s Food and Nutrition Service Department is providing free lunch ‘grab and go’ meals to all Ridgefield Public School students Monday through Friday during the duration of the emergency school closure. To mitigate the spread of the virus, meals are presented outside the designated school on tables. Only one person from each vehicle is allowed to approach the tables and pick up the meals. Kindly keep your social distance from other individuals. All meals are based on product availability. Meals should be consumed within an hour of pick up or refrigerated immediately. If your child has a food allergy or medical issue, please let the Food and Nutrition staff know. Accommodations will be made to the best extent possible.

Location: *East Ridge Middle School – front vestibule.*

Time of Operation: *Monday through Friday – 11a.m. to 1p.m. only.*

Special Services

Special Education and related services are working closely with families to deliver continuity of learning services. Teams have been engaged in weekly consultations/team meetings, pre-recorded video lessons, feedback on student work, and facilitation with families on how to navigate Google Classroom and the G Suite toolbox. Special educators and related services staff members are collaborating with general education colleagues to ensure student accommodations are being provided during distance learning.

Dr. Hannaway and Dr. Showah provided an update to families of students with special needs regarding the implementation of services, and the Planning and Placement Team and 504 meetings in their letter dated March 30 that was emailed via case managers. All special education and related service providers

are highly focused on supporting students' social and emotional well-being during this time, and encourage families to take full advantage of social workers, school psychologists, and school counselor services.

Families of students with special needs who will be transitioning between schools in September (PreK-K, 5th to 6th, 8th to 9th, and 12th to 18-21) will receive specific information in the coming weeks about how their current teams propose to plan for this upcoming change.

English Language Services (ELS) continue during the closure. ELS tutors are co-teachers on Google Classrooms and are supporting students with their general education classwork and assignments. Tutors assist in providing accommodations to students and/or their classwork, as well as providing consultation and resources directly to parents.

eLearning

The faculty and staff have worked to create a 'Continuity of Learning Plan' for students that is developmentally appropriate and family-friendly. Please know that teams are considering the balance of many variables: screen times, independence, access to technology, social interaction, and family structures. As we make shifts, we will continue to collect feedback and modify and adjust as necessary.

- **Elementary (K-5)** - Over the next few weeks, teachers will continue "Office Hours" and are working hard on pre-recorded videos for some lessons and class events. You can expect to hear more from your school in the coming days.
- **Secondary (6-12)** - Middle and High School faculty will introduce pre-recorded video lessons, as well as "live" Office Hours.

The eLearning site is now open and available to staff, students, and families. You can find the site directly from our home page, or you can also access it from [here](#). The site provides an abundance of resources for families and staff as well as COVID-19 information.

Virtual 'Boundaries'

As you might expect, faculty and staff are transitioning to a teaching environment of which they are not accustomed. Educators typically spend countless hours preparing their traditional classrooms to be inviting and to serve as learning tools for students. Now, family rooms, kitchens, dining rooms, even bedrooms have been converted to small classrooms. The 'new' classroom settings are not ideal, yet we know that the interaction between students and teachers can be. As our teachers at various levels transition to more pre-recorded and 'live' teaching we ask the following of students and families:

- Where developmentally possible, students participate in their on-line learning independently. This will help us protect all students and any personally identifiable information about any child;

- If a parent must be in the session (due to age or other factors) that they do not engage with the teacher, their own child, or other students;
- That no lesson be recorded without the school principal's permission and;
- Social media is not used to comment on students and/or teachers lessons.

Our goal is to foster an environment where students and staff can take risks, engage as learners and be comfortable communicating and collaborating with their peers just as they do in 'physical school.'

Communication during eLearning

We are grateful for your patience and feedback during these extraordinary times. During this period of 'eLearning', the communications systems you are familiar with remain in place. Please address any questions or concerns you have to your child's teacher or if needed, to your child's principal. If you have a Technology/IT issue, please also start with the classroom teacher, then contact: lrushka@ridgefieldps.net, (203)-894-5550, ext #4848.

Testing

The State of Connecticut was granted a waiver of all summative testing (Smarter, NGSS, CT SAT, CTAA and CTAS) and there will not be Next Generation Accountability for the 2019-20 school year. Today, the College Board posted the AP exam schedule, you can find those details [here](#).

Grading

The topic of grading is, and will continue to be, a discussion point for our school district. We have been collaborating at each level and across levels to determine what is best for our students. We are also meeting regularly with other school districts in our District Reference Groups (DRG) and across the state. The Connecticut State Department of Education has been communicating with Institutes of Higher Education within the State of Connecticut and will share with local school districts as they receive more information.

Status of School Buildings

Our schools remain locked down. All schools received an EPA registered hospital-grade antimicrobial surface protectant spray process on March 30. Our custodial staff continues to check building status every three days, and maintenance is on call to respond to any building issues. Our building mechanicals are monitored remotely by our HVAC group, and all systems are monitored by our building automation service contractor.

The facilities department recently donated several cases of personal protective equipment (PPE) to the Ridgefield Visiting Nurses Association and the Ridgefield Fire Department.