LETTER FROM SUPERINTENDENT MATT NELSON
DISTANCE LEARNING & APRIL VACATION UPDATE
FRIDAY, APRIL 10, 2020

Good evening:

I hope all is well. We have just competed our fourth week of distance learning and I continue to be impressed with everyone’s hard work as we adjust to this new reality. On April 6, 2020, the Sanford School Committee approved a Distance Learning Plan to ensure that learning continues while our school buildings are closed. This Plan has been posted on our website and is also available by clicking here.

It is a fluid document, designed to guide Sanford’s students, families and staff through this distance learning journey. The major goals of the plan are:

• Maintaining a sense of connectedness for students and staff
• Supporting students, staff and families with this new way of learning
• Providing continuity of instruction via “distance learning” for ALL students
• Ensuring the continued health and well-being of students and staff

It is also important that I update everyone regarding April vacation. We administered a survey to staff, students and parents for feedback regarding potential options for April vacation. We arrived at a solution that allows us to enjoy a little break from distance learning while ending the school year earlier than planned. Instead of observing a full week of vacation, we will hold school on Tuesday, April 21st, Wednesday, April 22nd and Thursday, April 23rd. This will allow us to end the school year on Tuesday, June 9th for
students and Friday, June 12th for faculty and staff. This allows us to maintain distance-learning momentum, adhere to Governor Mills’ “Stay Home Stay Safe” executive order AND provide a small break with back-to-back long weekends (April 18-20 & April 24-26).

Maine’s Commissioner of Education recently recommended that schools in the State begin planning for distance learning that could extend through the end of the current school year. I am hesitant to close Sanford schools through the end of this academic year for several reasons. First and foremost, I know the burden distance learning places on families and staff as we all struggle to balance so many aspects of our busy lives during this demanding and stressful time. Second, as impressive as our staff has been providing learning opportunities for students each day, we know that the face-to-face interactions that define our normal school days cannot be replaced through distance learning. Finally, I know how important end-of-the-year celebrations are for our students and families.

In reality, it is highly unlikely that our staff and students will return to our school buildings this school year but I am holding out hope there may be an extraordinary change in the pandemic’s impact on our community. If so, I will consider safe options for providing in-person closure to this school year, even if only for a minimal amount of time. For now, we will continue with our distance learning plan until May 4th at which time we will reevaluate our position. I want to be clear: students and staff will only return when and if it has been deemed safe to do so. The safety of our entire community is our top priority.

Please remember that our playgrounds and athletic facilities remain closed, and I encourage all families to ensure that
students of all ages are following proper social distancing practices. Please help us stop the spread of this disease by staying at home and refraining from large- or small-group gatherings. We should all be well aware that this disease is one that can impact every one of us, regardless of age or prior health status. Please – stay at home, stay healthy, and help us protect everyone in the community.