

Letter from Superintendent Nelson
Sanford School Department

Extending Distance Learning for the Remainder of the 2019-2020 School Year

Wednesday, April 29, 2020

Good Evening,

During her press conference yesterday, Governor Janet Mills extended Maine's Stay-at-Home Order through May 31, 2020. For Sanford's public schools, this means that "distance learning" will remain in place for the remainder of the school year. Classrooms will remain closed, with the expectation of reopening in the fall as conditions permit. As you may have seen, Governor Mills provided details of a four-stage phase-in "post-COVID19" model that placed the re-opening of schools in the final stage (no earlier than September 2020 dependent on the success of stages one, two and three). This four-stage plan also included limits on group gatherings and criteria for re-opening businesses. Still to be determined is whether summer school programs, athletics, end-of-year celebrations and the use of school facilities for various summer school programs will be allowed this summer.

I will continue to carefully monitor the situation and we will communicate information as it becomes available and decisions are made regarding specific end-of-the-year activities (graduation, kindergarten screening, award ceremonies, etc.). Thank you for your patience as our school leadership teams continue to explore the various options and best ways to recognize students as we close out this school year. It may mean holding scaled back or virtual celebrations, or, in some unfortunate cases, canceling an event entirely. Safety will continue to guide these decisions and we will abide by the Governor's plan to ensure the safety of our students, staff and community members.

I am aware of the tremendous burden that distance learning has put on our students, staff and families. Historically, it is challenging to maintain student engagement as summer draws near so I have asked our teachers to adjust their schedules and not assign any new learning after Memorial Day. The last week of May and first week of June will be focused on allowing time for students to submit outstanding assignments, practice and review key concepts and areas of weakness, return books and technology and to retrieve personal belongings; your child's school administrative team will communicate information regarding these schedules and processes separately.

Please know that our primary focus remains the health and personal well-being of our students, staff and community members – and also the academic progress of our students. Student academic achievement is crucial as we prepare to return to the classrooms next fall. We do not want our students falling too far behind grade level expectations and benchmarks. I encourage everyone to continue their amazing efforts during this unusual time and I challenge everyone to finish the 2019-2020 school year strong.