

March 17, 2020

Good Evening Seymour Families,

We understand that there has been a lot of talk and concern about a potential plan for distance learning. We want you to realize that this was not the original plan that our State Department of Education had originally discussed and has been shared with you in previous communications. Nothing like this has ever happened in terms of its impact on education and as such the information that has come in has been ever-changing. In terms of a brief recap of all that has occurred from last week up until now: There has been a lot of discussion about how individual school districts are handling the COVID-19 crisis.

As of last Thursday afternoon, fourteen school districts in the state had applied for the distance learning waiver. At that time, only nine of these districts had been granted the waiver. This waiver caused severe concerns amongst Superintendents and Board of Education Chairs as it required their signature to validate that all of our students learning needs were being met. We all agreed that even the best distance learning programs could not replace our teachers and meet the variety of learning needs that our students have. Districts that had stated they had a waiver that was signed off by the state, were those districts that took on that risk against legal advice. The reality is that the majority of School Districts (156 in total) had not made the choice to utilize distance learning as it was not deemed equitable for all. The Commissioner of Education also stated that districts should treat these immediate days (2 weeks) as inclement weather days and possibly seek to provide students with some supplemental work, but the directive was to not try to replace the normal learning day.

However, yesterday Superintendents received notification from the Commissioner of Education stating that he wanted us to further look into distance learning as a reality in the event that we are out longer than the April 1, 2020 date issued by the Governor on Sunday evening even though, he stated prior that he wanted us to just treat the days as inclement weather days. Later yesterday evening, our Commissioner of Education shared that he would provide resources for school districts to use in order to move forward with distance learning in the near future. He also shared that districts no longer have to submit the 180 day waiver.

Area Superintendents as well as members of my team have been continually researching additional ways to do this. I have also spoken with Teacher Union leadership for their further input on this. Our Union President has agreed with our stance since the beginning. We will continue to look for further guidance and the model from the Commissioner of Education that he will eventually share with us, but we feel that something needs to be done now for our students.

In terms of our plans going forward with distance learning starting next Monday, March 23, 2020:

- We will disseminate technology if needed by some students.
- In order to receive technology, please have this google sign form filled out prior to dissemination. In order to access the form, you will need to log in using your child's Seymour schools login. Here is the link: <https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1N8iYbfmBGx1LqRT0fvrNbLM5UrzFWO1ZjBcc-QZy8Ls/edit>
- Members of our technology team will hand out devices to anyone that has a completed form on March 18 from 12:00pm – 3:00pm, March 19 from 4:00pm – 6:00pm, and March 21 from 10:00am – 1:00pm all at Seymour Middle School. There will be no need to get out of your car as this will be a drive by pick up of the technology at SMS.
- In the event, you do not have Internet access at your home, please use this link from Comcast where those who do not have access to the Internet, can receive it free for 60 days. Please see the link below for information on 2 months of free internet service in response to COVID-19: <https://www.internetessentials.com/covid19>
- Teachers will be online on Friday March 20 to do a quick check in with the students and to test the platform that they will be using.

Plan for Digital Learning Outlined

We want all to know, that Seymour Public Schools recognizes this is a concerning time for all and that no digital plan will ever replace your child's teacher. However, we have to move forward the best way that we can so that our students can continue to learn and grow. This being the case, it is not our intention for our students to be staring at a computer screen for 7-8 hours a day. Our students in grades K-12 should have approximately four hours of work each school day in order to keep them focused and to continue their learning the best way possible. All principals, teachers, and staff will periodically check in to assess and receive feedback about what you may be seeing at home and what may need to be adjusted. We want to thank you in advance for your patience and partnership! While this may change when we receive further guidance from the Commissioner of Education, here is the plan that we will use.

1. The student day would be a shortened day, however, staff would be working a full day to support student distance learning. The student day would be planned for approximately:
 - a. Up to 1.5 hours per day for Pre K
 - b. Up to 4 hours per day for Kindergarten to Grade 12. Our learning goals will focus on the application of critical skills and core content objectives. The activity will also be designed to maximize the likelihood that students can complete the activity with independence as this will minimize the number of challenges for parents during this emergency period. This will also promote students being self-directed learners, which is an important 21st century skill. However, our teachers and staff will be available from 8:00am – 2:00pm to answer student or parent questions that arise.
2. The implementation of this plan signifies a significant emergency. As such, we have asked all staff to help in any way needed to ensure an equitable learning experience for students. Please note that during this time of working remotely, our staff will be expected to be actively engaged in work during the hours of 8:00am -2:00pm and to be available for calls, video conferencing if the teacher chooses, email and messaging exchanges, and the like. All staff that are expected to work will be available by email or other form of acceptable electronic communication to support students who are working on these learning assignments, assist families, or reply to questions or requests.
3. In terms of a Schedule: teachers would plan for the scheduled day.
 - a. Teachers in Grades K - 5 may choose to work together to post a common assignment for their students or they may choose to link theirs individually.
 - b. Teachers in Grades 6 - 12 will link their assignments individually by the day, their class period and name. (For example DAY A, Mrs. Smith, grade 9 Social Studies period 1).
4. Google GSuite is the familiar platform for most of our students in Grades K-12. The GSuite includes Gmail, Google Docs, Google Classroom, Google Meet, Google Sheets, etc.) and is used by most teachers. For video conferencing in small or large groups, the district would use Google Meet (formerly Hangout). We will have one dedicated technology person overseeing each of the four buildings for questions, they are available from 8:00am to 4:00pm.:

Seymour High School: Charles Daniels
on Google Chat - cdaniels@seymourschools.org
via E-mail - cdaniels@seymourschools.org
via Phone 203-463-3036
[Remote Desktop Support](#)

Seymour Middle School: David Moktan
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Bungay School: Derrick Martin
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Chatfield LoPresti School: Rob Dyer
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[Remote Desktop Support](#)

5. If you or your child needs a refresher on google classroom click this link (Here is a link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k388Q8xvsXg>)
6. In the event that a student/family is not responding to email or they are not doing their assigned work, the student's teacher and also their Guidance Counselor or Social Worker will reach out to you to see if further assistance is needed.
7. Our Guidance Department and Social Workers will be available between 8:00am – 2:00pm to answer any questions that you may have about your child. They will also be available to speak with your children if and when they need to between the hours of 8:00am and 2:00pm.
8. We recognize that our staff and our families may be stressed or worried. That is why we encourage all staff to take the time to assess their students' mental, physical, and emotional wellbeing. How are they doing? How are their families? Teachers should check-in with their students, as long as this distance learning is in place. Once again, just like when school is in-person in school buildings, if teachers are concerned about students, they should reach out to support staff and administration.
9. We will make our best efforts so that online content and instruction must be made accessible to all students to the best extent possible, including students with special needs, during distance learning days. Teachers will attempt to plan learning activities that are differentiated for specific learning profiles. The teacher's approach will be consistent with each individual's accommodations in the course of a regular school day. No student's status or ability to complete the expected work on a distance learning day should be impacted by their special education or 504 or ELL status. Our Special Education teachers will continue to provide modifications to posted assignments for the students that they work with. We are currently working with our Director of Pupil Services who will send out a communication on how annual reviews, triennials, transition meetings, and initial referrals will be conducted during this time.
10. It is expected that our teachers will provide expectations and feedback to students as to when they need to submit assignments via Google Classroom and/or share completed documents, either through email or individual learning platforms, for feedback and or grading. Teachers should keep track of the assignments and the level of participation/work completion for each student. They should then be

graded and given credit in a manner consistent with the teacher's existing grading policies. Students with accommodations should have the same latitude in timeline, support and standards for completion for this work as they would for any other at-home assignment. It is the responsibility of the student to complete the learning task to the best of their ability based on the current surrounding circumstances and return it to the teacher so it can receive credit for completion and/or grades. Like in-person school sessions, if a student is ill or unable to participate for a documented reason, the teacher would notify the student of expectations given the individual circumstances.

In the event that your child wishes to receive free lunch, our Food Service Department will be offering a grab and go lunch bag at the front of Seymour Middle School between 11:00am – 1:00pm on Wednesday and Thursday of this week and on Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday of the following week. This is being offered to all families, regardless of meal status. More days to come if we are to remain closed.

Please continue to look on the following mediums for any communications from our schools:

- Seymour Schools Facebook
- Seymour Schools website

Throughout this time, flexibility is the key to support distance learning along with supporting individual students and families. We realize that this is a new process for everyone and we may need to make changes as we go, but remember it is the students that we are here for. Keeping their learning in mind and us making our best efforts to achieve this, will help us to get through this.

If you have any questions about COVID-19, please call 2-1-1. We thank you for your patience and understanding during this time. Please be assured that my team will continue to monitor the situation daily and will keep you informed as changes occur. Remember, that together we will get through this as a team. We still remain positive and hopeful that we will resume our normal school routines on April 1, 2020. However, by utilizing this platform, our last day of school will be on June 12, 2020 as opposed to June 25, 2020 as we had originally thought. Therefore, we are in essence only adding 1 additional day to the calendar. This being the case, our graduation date will be also be set for June 12, 2020 per the Chair of the Board of Education.

As we all know, this situation is ever-changing and we are trying to stay on top of it the best way we can. Please make every effort to keep your families safe and healthy.

Sincerely,
Michael Wilson
Superintendent

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