



## Acton-Boxborough Regional School District

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April 2, 2020

ABRSD Families,

I hope each of you is safe and well. I also hope that your family has found some opportunities to take breaks from the stress of life these last few weeks and spend some time pursuing activities that bring joy to your family. I want to take this opportunity to thank our educators and leaders for their work to connect with and engage students and families thus far during our closure.

When we closed on March 12, we did so with the understanding that we would be closed for one, or possibly two weeks. Since that time, we have seen Governor Baker extend our closure until May 4. Additionally, the Commissioner of Education has released updated guidelines for school districts' remote learning plans, and we have gained a deeper understanding of ways we can support students and families during this closure. We have also had an opportunity to settle into our new reality and begin to learn which strategies work best for students and families.

Since last week, our leadership has been working to expand our distance learning plans for all grade levels. Tomorrow, we will provide teachers with these revised guidelines and spend Friday, 4/3 working with teachers to plan for implementation of this plan.

Students at each grade level have different developmental needs and our plan will look different for elementary students than it does for high school students. Overall, our updated learning plans are designed to provide greater structure to the distance learning environment and to students' days. Some common themes of our plans K-12 include **daily** opportunities for students to:

- Interact with their teachers in a "live" or synchronous learning environment through the use of chat (Google Chat) or video conferencing technology (Zoom)
- Work independently (or asynchronously) to accommodate the wide variety of schedules our students and families maintain during our closure. Students and teachers will use SeeSaw (Grades K-2) and Google Classroom (Grades 3-12) for asynchronous learning
- Practice skills and learn new content that can be appropriately supported in a distance learning environment
- Complete and submit work and receive feedback from teachers about their learning

In its guidance to schools, the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) described remote learning: *"Remote learning is not synonymous with online learning. Remote learning can take place in a*

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*multitude of ways, including by helping students engage with resources in their everyday lives and in the natural world around them. Remote learning also provides unique opportunities to further engage students in the arts or interdisciplinary work. Finally, we must be conscious of the effects of increased screen time and seek balance between learning through technology and remote learning that happens offline to support students' curiosity and understanding."* DESE also provided guidance that *"districts support students to engage in meaningful and productive learning for approximately half the length of a regular school day."*

Supporting student learning during the day includes all work that students complete, including synchronous ("live") activities, as well as asynchronous (independent) activities. In our planning, it was paramount to us to recognize that our children's developmental needs vary greatly from K-12, and that our families' daily schedules and routines vary greatly and impact their ability to support our youngest students' participation in live instruction.

Our learning plan will expect student participation Monday through Thursday of each week. Fridays will be meeting days for educators to collaborate through school-wide, department and grade-level meetings, working with special educators, English Language educators, and other related service providers to make sure that students receive appropriate support for learning during this time.

In our planning, we have developed rough guidelines for the total amount of time expected of students, Monday through Thursday at each grade level:

	K-2	3-4	5-6	7-8	9-12
"Live" Learning (Synchronous)	20-30 minutes*	20-30 minutes*	20-30 minutes*	40-60 minutes*	40-60 minutes*
"Independent Learning" (Asynchronous)	40-60 minutes	75-90 minutes	90-120 minutes	~2 hours	2.5-3 hours
<b>Total Structured Learning Time</b>	1-1.5 hours	1.5-2 hours	2-2.5 hours	~3 hours	3-3.5 hours

*\* Some students may have additional "live" or synchronous sessions for work with special educators, EL educators or other staff as appropriate.*

We will be implementing this new learning plan gradually over the next week and a half. During that time period you should expect:

- Over the next week, our educators will gradually increase the frequency of meetings until "live" sessions occur daily for students from Monday through Thursday of each week. We recognize that some classes may already be conducting these sessions.
- Beginning the week of April 6th, our educators will gradually introduce students to the new learning plans at each grade level, and course (junior high school and high school). This will result in a developmentally-appropriate increase in:

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- Activities that students are asked to complete across subjects
- Assignments that students are asked to submit to teachers
- Feedback from teachers about student learning

While we expect our students to participate in these plans, we understand that every student and family circumstance is different. In the coming weeks, some students and families will experience a variety of challenges that are beyond their control, and that cause their priorities to shift from distance learning to more personal and important areas of focus. It is critical for us to understand the shifting nature of our environment and support students and families in ways that are meaningful to them and responsive to their individual needs. While students will receive feedback on the work they share with teachers, we will not give formal assessments or grades during the time we are closed, and students will not be penalized for any content or skills they do not acquire. Grading, particularly for high school students is a complex, multi-faceted issue. We are continuing to study grading options for high school students and will have more information in the next few weeks about how we will close out third quarter grades.

This has been an incredibly challenging time for all of us. I cannot emphasize enough that this is an entirely new venture for our students and teachers. Our educators have needed to learn many new skills over the last few weeks and adapt these to our educational environment. On a personal level, I am sure that we all wish that our district could instantly adapt to these challenging times. The reality is that change of this nature is extraordinarily complex, takes time, and is being done during a period of extraordinary stress and uncertainty for everyone. Thank you all for your continued patience and support of our educators as they work to support your children during this challenging time.

Sincerely,

Peter Light,  
Superintendent of Schools

Marie Altieri,  
Deputy Superintendent of Schools

Deborah Bookis,  
Assistant Superintendent for Teaching and Learning

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