



# Acton-Boxborough Regional School District

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Peter J. Light  
Superintendent of Schools

To: Acton-Boxborough Regional School Committee  
From: ABRSD Leadership Team  
Date: May 6, 2020  
Re: School Closure Update for School Committee Meeting 5.6.20

We are pleased to provide you with this update regarding [our distance learning program](#). Since we closed on March 13, we have continued to develop our program. Last week, our DESE Commissioner released updated guidance for schools and districts. Simultaneously, we surveyed our students, staff and families to better understand how our distance learning program was working, and to understand stakeholders perceptions of our work. Overall, we are pleased with the survey results in that a significantly larger percentage of our stakeholders report satisfaction with our program than report dissatisfaction. Similarly, a review of DESE's updated guidance shows that all of our work to date was well-informed, and we will only need to make incremental adjustments to our practice moving forward. However, we also recognize that not all students and families experience distance learning the same way, and we want to continue to grow our program in order to improve outcomes for our students. This document is designed to provide you with an in-depth overview of how we will continue to evolve our remote programming in the coming weeks.

## **Survey Results**

The District recently surveyed students, families, and staff to better understand perceptions of our distance learning program. Survey results may be accessed via [this link](#), but a summary of key findings is below:

### **Workload:**

- Students in grades 4-6 generally reported spending between one and three hours per day engaged in distance learning. Most students in this group reported that the workload is manageable.
- Students in grades 7-8 generally reported spending between 2-3 hours per day engaged in distance learning, although an equal number reported spending less and more time than this. Most students in this group reported that the workload is manageable.
- Students in grades 9-12 generally reported spending 2-3 hours or more per day engaged in distance learning, with a significant number reporting more than 3 hours per day. Students in this group overwhelmingly reported they were able to manage distance learning, but an equal number agreed and disagreed that the workload was too much.

### **Synchronous Online Connections and Asynchronous Learning Activities/Assignments:**

- Overwhelmingly across all surveys and levels, parents and students reported that maintaining class connections and touching base with their teachers are the highest priority right now.
- Students and families at all levels widely reported being able to connect daily with teachers/peers synchronously online and asynchronously through learning activities/assignments.

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### Overall Satisfaction & Enjoyment:

- Nearly half of students in grades 4-6 reported feeling neutral toward the distance learning program; of the remaining students, twice as many reported feeling enjoyment as those who did not.
- More than half of all parents reported being very satisfied or satisfied with the district's distance learning program (22% neutral, 10% dissatisfied or very dissatisfied).

### Managing the Distance Learning Program (DLP):

- 78% of students in Grades 4-12 reported that they were primarily responsible for managing their DLP.
- 75% of families reported that they were able to manage their child's DLP, compared with 85% of students, and 84% didn't feel the DLP required too much of families.
- Nearly 47% of families didn't feel the DLP required too much of their students, compared with 81% of students.

### Staff Survey

- Overall staff survey results can be accessed [here](#). Slightly less than 60% of certified staff reported that it is difficult or very difficult to work effectively from home, compared with 30% of non-certified staff.
- The top challenges associated with working remotely included: the amount of time spent online (42%), daily amount of time spent working (36%), general worry about COVID-19 (35%), and social isolation (28%). In addition to these challenges, 28% of staff indicated "Other," an open-ended response for this question, and cited missing students, being unprepared to teach online, and feeling like they can't make the impact that they want to/could if school was still in session.
- 62% of certified staff report that the balance between synchronous and asynchronous learning time currently occurring is 'just right, while 7.7% prefer more synchronous time, and 7.4% prefer less.
- 75% of all staff prefer to receive updates from the district about once a week, and almost 70% are confident or extremely confident in our district leadership team to make the right decisions and manage this crisis.

### **Department of Elementary & Secondary Education (DESE) Guidance and Distance Learning Plans**

Last week, the leadership team reviewed the DESE's Phase 3 Guidance. DESE specifically entitled this guidance document, [Strengthening Our Remote Learning Experience](#) because, while the focus is primarily on the student experience, they stated that the "student experience is tightly connected to the educator and family experience, as remote learning has been a paradigm shift for the entire educational community." Learning how our community is experiencing distance learning was important to us as a district, which is why we spent time last week surveying our students, families, and staff. This triangulation of data provided a more complete picture of how this paradigm shift is impacting our entire community.

### DESE's guidance **reiterates the same three principles that must continue to guide our work:**

- *The safety and well-being of students, families, and staff has been and must continue to be our top priority as an educational community (physical health, safety, and nutrition, but also social-emotional and mental health needs, which could intensify during this time).*
- *This crisis disproportionately affects students who are most vulnerable in terms of their physical and mental health and also academically. Equity needs to be a top consideration in local planning efforts, especially as districts and schools make plans to manage an extended closure.*

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- *Maintaining connections between school staff, students, and families is paramount, particularly for the most vulnerable members of our school communities.*

Further, it recommends that districts and schools **focus on the four elements below to ensure a strong baseline remote learning program**. However the only area where they modified their initial recommendations is the focus on covering the prerequisite content standards. The elements are listed below along with bullets that outline our strategies for implementing them.

*1. Prioritize meaningful connections with educators and peers.*

- Synchronous Learning: Priority One has been and will continue to be the social and emotional connection for students to school and to each other
- At every grade, our educators are connecting with students via Zoom for Educators (times vary according to grade)

*2. Provide engaging core instruction focused on the prerequisite content standards that are most critical for student success in the next grade.*

- K-6 curriculum coordinators and coaches and 7-12 Coordinators, Department Leaders and Building Leadership are reviewing critical standards by grade and discipline, and identifying whether each standard:
  - was taught and students demonstrated proficiency before the closure,
  - reviewed during Phase 2 (March 26 - May 3),
  - will be introduced during Phase 3 (May 4- June 12), and/or,
  - will be introduced at the beginning of next year or before the next unit in the learning progression.
- When it is deemed that new content is important and appropriate to be taught in a distance learning environment, educators will introduce it to students.
- If it is deemed that new content would be better introduced when students return, educators will make appropriate adjustments to curriculum moving forward.
- Transitions Teams and grade/discipline specific teams of educators at schools will continue to review and make adjustments for the 2020-21 school year.

*3. Offer opportunities for enrichment, exercise, and play.*

- [K-6 Learning Boards](#) include visual arts, performing arts, PE and movement opportunities.
- [Friday PDF](#) links include Movement/PE, Visual Arts, Performing Arts, Mindfulness, and Nature activities for all ages.
- Our [AB Wellness website](#) includes Social-Emotional Resources for Families (general and COVID-related).
- The [PreSchool Home Activities Choice Board](#), [K-2](#) and [3-6](#) Choice Boards include links for further enrichment activities.
- For K-6, we are creating a menu of choice *projects* for the last two weeks of school that will include resources and ideas as well as the freedom to pursue a child or family's own interest as well as ways for students to share their projects.

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4. Ensure programming is accessible and secure and communication is streamlined for students and their families.

- Special educators and English language educators work closely with classroom educators and serve as members of the K-6 Distance Learning Planning Teams with their general educator counterparts.
- All learning activities, experiences, and assignments are posted on our [Distance Learning website](#) and/or communicated through Google Classroom at the educator level.
- Families/students and educators communicate directly through Zoom, email, Google Classroom, SeeSaw, Bloomz, etc.
- Synchronous learning is secure through Zoom for Education (which is [FERPA and COPPA Compliant](#)).
- The learning boards [posted on our website](#) are translatable to other languages (by using the drop-down language tab in the top left corner of the main page).
- We post all District communication on our website under [District Communication During Closure](#).
- General school supplies, books, dice and playing cards are available at the Little Free Libraries located in front of the Administration Building and Blanchard Elementary School.
- We have distributed art supplies alongside lunches and at the local food pantry. We will continue to distribute them more widely in the coming weeks.

DESE also recommends two steps in **developing a system for identifying and supporting students not effectively engaged in remote learning**:

1. Collect information to understand each student’s level of engagement in remote learning.

- The high school collects information about students’ engagement in distance learning in our database. The high school reports high levels of student participation:

Students Reported in 3 or More Classes as of April 30	# of Students	% of AB Students
Attending some synchronous meetings AND completing some assigned work	1667	91.60%
Attending some synchronous meetings but NOT completing any assigned work	60	3.30%
Completing some assigned work but NOT attending synchronous meetings	10	0.50%
The student has been in touch but is NOT attending synchronous meetings and NOT completing assigned work	10	0.50%
Not in contact, despite outreach by teacher/staff	24	1.30%
Not in contact; no outreach. Staff members are aware of the specific reason a student is not participating	3	0.20%

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- At the Junior High School and elementary schools, educators have been independently tracking student engagement and making efforts to reach out to families when students do not engage. Our schools report very few students for whom there has been no contact. For students who do not regularly engage, there are a variety of reasons, including personal choice, for not doing so.

*2. Provide supports to further engage all students, with a focus on meeting foundational student needs.*

- Classroom teachers are identifying and working with small groups of students *in addition* to time in whole class zoom meetings.
- Reading Specialists provide small group Zoom sessions with assistants for students on their caseload; participate in Zoom meetings with classroom educators, and at times provide mini-lessons (Foundations, word work); maintain communication regarding the use of Lexia; create videos of strategies or skills for students on caseload as well as archiving for possible use by reading department colleagues.
- Math assistants are meeting regularly with small groups of students at each elementary school to provide additional support for students. They are also helping to add accessibility supports for the learning plans.
- Our special educators (including related service providers) have completed learning plans with parent input for all students with an IEP. They are focused on working with students, individually and in small groups, to provide specialized supports and instruction to build and maintain skills. Additionally, our special educators collaborate with classroom teachers to develop and implement individualized accommodations for learning plans and work to schedule virtual TEAM meetings whenever possible.
- Our nurses are engaged in a variety of activities their typical daily health office traffic doesn't permit, such as updating district wide nursing protocols, collaborating with and attending health classes at the secondary level, and inputting incoming kindergartener data into the health database (normally done over the summer). A few are also engaged in working with the state school nursing association to develop health guidelines for school reopening, and a few are volunteering in their spare time at our local food pantry, on Neighbor Brigade, and serving on their local medical reserve corps to help field medical questions from residents and do contact tracing.
- Our counselors and psychologists regularly meet with students around local support and resources, next-level and post-secondary planning, home/relationship issues, and struggles related to the pandemic and isolation. Elementary counselors support school-wide meetings, jump into class Zoom sessions, consult with families as needed, provide families SEL activities, and meet with small groups of students.
- High school counselors and psychologists have provided a few online parenting sessions on how to manage anxiety and behaviors at home and to answer questions about the college-going process. The "regular" JH/HS counseling workload still exists, which has them registering students, advising on 2020-21 course selection, communicating with colleges and universities, postsecondary planning, and helping kids with curriculum/classes when issues arise around motivation or access (i.e. Section 504).

Lastly, DESE encourages districts and schools to **consider the strategic collaboration, teaming, and differentiated roles that remote learning makes possible.**

- From the start of our closure, at the elementary level, we designed our curriculum planning teams to incorporate collaboration among classroom teachers, special educators, and English language educators. Additionally, once weekly learning boards are completed, our classroom teachers, special

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educators, and English language educators continue to collaborate to develop individual student accommodations as needed.

- At the secondary level, our special educators and English language educators collaborate directly with each classroom teacher in order to provide access to our students.

### **Summary and Next Steps for Distance Learning**

Based on our analysis of survey results and guidance from DESE, we do not intend to change direction for our distance learning program for the remainder of this school year. While the foundation and philosophy of our distance learning program will continue through the end of the year, we will continue to grow our program in several key ways by:

- continuing to maintain ***social and emotional connection*** for students to school and to classmates
- introducing students to the *most critical new content* in their classes that our educators *deem appropriate* for the distance learning environment
- planning to *modify fall curriculum* to ensure that any *critical standards not learned this year will be taught to students when they return in the fall*
- increasing the opportunities for students to participate in small group and individual meetings with teachers *in addition to the regularly scheduled zoom meetings* in order to provide additional support for all students.

We are also in the process of planning summer opportunities for students and making plans for our students to return to us in the fall. Both topics will be addressed in future communication.

Sincerely,

The ABRSD Leadership Team