



MAHWAH BOARD OF EDUCATION
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Dear Colleagues,

Who would have thought that when we left six weeks ago to embark on this virtual learning experience and planning for Phase I that we would soon be transitioning into Phase III of instruction? Your work and effort in the first two phases will allow for us to transition into this new phase with relative ease. As we review the feedback from all of the stakeholders in this experience, inclusive of students, parents, teachers, paraprofessionals, and administration, it is evident that there is a deep appreciation for the efforts and commitment that has been showcased by your instruction and by your overall care for our school community to date.

While we are aware that we cannot perfectly parallel the face-to-face teaching and learning experiences for our students, we do know that this remote experience can match *some* of the learning and expectations that would typically take place during the school day.

We emphasize *some* because we understand that our remote instruction is not identical to our usual in-classroom curricular efforts. We are working with you to identify the critical skills needed for our students to transition into the 2020-2021 school year. Most notably, we cannot undervalue that, within each of our student's homes, there is, understandably, a range of personal matters related to home that takes precedence over the school day. Notwithstanding personal challenges and hardship, we do have a great success rate of students' attendance and participation in our learning.

We are going to maintain our compassion for all our students, as well as for you, and find ways to connect with our students and with each other. We, too, recognize the struggle between maintaining integrity to curricular standards while paying close attention to the needs of humanity.

Phase III of instruction will pay particular attention to the essential elements of instruction to usher our students into what instruction will look like into the 2020-2021 school year.

Phase III of Instruction - Reframing: Access and Instructional Decision-Making

(Beginning April 27 until return)

Phase I focused on maintaining the learning that took place to date, which was deemed as purposeful efforts to review, to remediate, and to enhance; in Phase II, we focused on incrementally exposing our students to new curricula. Phase III will continue with the teaching of new content that focuses on the collaboratively-predetermined essential understandings of the curricula, instructional delivery, and assessment.

Pace: With the information that we have distilled from the first two phases, it is clear that - to no one's fault - the pace in the virtual environment does not parallel that of a brick-and-mortar experience, nor should it ever. With the understanding that pacing needs to match our circumstances, we are beginning to determine which concepts are critical and make those the focus of our lessons in Phase III. We know that an expectation of absolute coverage and completion, of all concepts/curricula is not in the best interest of you and our students. We will work together in order to create a plan that supports our learners, from now through the 2020-2021 school year.

Instructional Delivery: We have shared our appreciation of the diverse instructional strategies that have been used to engage our learners over the course of the last two phases of instruction. The term of this closure now prompts us to continue to reflect on what is best for our students, specific to social-emotional well-being and academic progression. With that in mind, it is important for us to continue to increase the frequency of our face-to-face interactions with our students. This time serves as an emotional check-in ensuring that students are coping, as an opportunity for a mini-lesson, and ultimately, as a chance for a much-needed face-to-face Q&A period. Using these face-to-face opportunities, in this flexible fashion, should decrease the number of emails that are going back-and-forth between teacher and student/parent. This also eliminates phone calls home, unless an emergency arises.

Assessment: During these non-traditional times, it is imperative that we are creative and flexible in our assessment options and methods. The priority of using assessment as feedback for growth should be a model on which we rely. The various factors that students are encountering while at home will not allow for any exact semblance of comparison to the marking periods in which they were present in the district. With this in mind, we must again recognize our students' circumstances. Traditional quizzes and tests cannot accurately assess all that you are doing and all that the students are doing, as it would typically. Instructionally, brief questions and prompts allow you to more authentically assess the understanding of the class and, in turn, allow for you to make meaningful instructional decisions for future lessons or Zoom video-conferencing.

Planning: As we reviewed our teacher survey results, we agree with the need to increase teacher planning time. In order to effectively deliver this unique instruction, opportunities to reflect, refine and collaborate with colleagues is planning time well spent during this process. The district is committed to providing additional time outside of the already predetermined prep periods. The district has determined the following dates will be used as "Independent Work Days/Make-Up Days" for our students. During this time, the teachers will be able to plan, collaborate, and fulfill their professional responsibilities. Families will be advised of the protocol for those days.

The dates are: April 24, May 8.

If the closure remains until the end of the year: May 21, and June 5 will also serve as planning days.

Ideas and support specific to technology integration can be found by visiting our [Mahwah Technology Integration Page](#), where you will find a host of materials, videos, and other resources of support. Ruth Davis, our Supervisor of Technology Integration, also continues to serve as a valuable resource to all of us.

In sincere closing, we want to thank you again for the work and dedication that you have shown during these trying times. Please make sure that you are seeking a balance between your own self-care and the hard work you are putting forth for our students. Giving yourself the permission to shut down your computer at the end of the day and be with your family, take a walk, engage in a hobby, or any other opportunity to maintain a healthy balance is expected.

With gratitude,

Michael DeTuro, Ed.D.
Director of Curriculum and Instruction