

Somerset Berkley Regional School District

All Students Achieving Excellence

April 4, 2020

Dear Somerset and Somerset Berkley Students and Families,

The Somerset Public Schools, Somerset Berkley Regional School District, and the Somerset Teachers' Association have been working diligently and collaboratively over the past several weeks during this extended school closure resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic to create a remote learning plan for students and teachers. This remote learning plan is designed to be meaningful and manageable with students, staff, and families in mind. Reports from health experts suggest that cases of COVID-19 may reach a peak later this month. While we are hoping we return to school on May 4th, we continue to plan for a longer period of time that we are away from school and each other. The information included in this communication is the result of our collaborative planning efforts and contributions of many teachers and administrators.

We are deeply grateful to all of our staff for their dedication and professionalism and to our families for your patience and understanding during this unprecedented time. We understand that this is a difficult and stressful time for students, families, faculty, staff, and administrators as we all continue to navigate these uncharted waters. It has been incredibly difficult and challenging for everyone to balance working from home along with the learning portion of your child(ren)'s day.

Every decision we make is based on what we believe is best for students. The social, emotional, and physical well-being of our students, families, and staff are our paramount concerns. The districts are committed to providing a remote learning environment that is both structured yet flexible enough for students to access essential learning standards while they deepen their learning and understanding of previously taught curriculum. From the very beginning of this closure a primary goal has been to minimize skill regression. With the extension of this school closure until May 4th, we are still committed to mitigating regression while also focusing on new learning. This new learning will address those standards that are most essential for students' current grades and courses as they prepare for May, June, and the 2020-2021 school year.

I am very thankful for the work our teachers have been doing to provide these learning experiences for students while also maintaining connections with students and families through virtual meetings, emails, and/or phone calls. Our teachers are preparing lessons and activities that are engaging while preparing students for the time when everyone is able to return to school and be together once again. As teachers are attempting to replicate a normal structure and routine as much as possible, they are providing meaningful, high-quality, and equitable direct-learning experiences and student self-directed learning activities that can be delivered in a variety of formats. Our educators have been asked to make significant shifts in the approach to teaching and learning with little opportunity to prepare for the changes we are all experiencing.

While teams of teachers and administrators have focused on providing quality instruction during this time, we are also focused on ensuring equity and access for all students. This includes those who receive special education services, our English Learners, students who receive free and reduced-price lunches, and those who have limited or no access to devices and/or the Internet at home. We are also keenly aware that many parents are working from home and there may not be enough access to technology to support parents'/guardians' employment and their children's ongoing learning.

We are providing families and students with our remote learning plan, which is grounded in the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education's (DESE) [Remote Learning Recommendations](#) as well as the [United States Department of Education \(USED\) Supplemental Facts Sheet, released March 21, 2020](#). Somerset's and Somerset Berkley's remote-learning plan includes a structured schedule that teachers will create for their classes. More specific information about student expectations, including times during which students may be meeting with their classes and a weekly plan for learning, will come from principals and teachers.

Remote Learning Plan

The global pandemic that we find ourselves in is requiring a shift both in the way we teach and in how students learn. We cannot replicate the school day under these circumstances and we do not expect parents to take on the role of their child(ren)'s teachers. There is much uncertainty about the next several weeks and months and we recognize that there may be times when other circumstances will take precedence over remote learning. With this in mind, teachers are providing students with engaging and meaningful learning activities. The information below summarizes and highlights our remote learning expectations of students and teachers.

Elementary Schools

Our elementary students can access daily remote learning guides. Remote learning plans will be available on the [Somerset/Somerset Berkley District At-Home Learning link](#) each Monday morning for families to access. Weekly remote learning plans will include daily learning activity choices, SEL options, as well as specialist days: Music Monday, Artistic Tuesday, Wellness Wednesday, Tech Thursday and Fun Friday. We encourage students to keep activities in a notebook or folder to bring to school when we return. Teachers will schedule meetings with students 3-5 times per week. We encourage students to attend whenever possible, but understand the limitations posed by time, technology, and other activities. We want our students' learning to be meaningful and fun, and we greatly appreciate your support keeping us connected.

Highlights of the SPS & SBRHS Remote Learning Plan

- We will continue to focus on the Social-Emotional Well-Being of our students, families, and educators.
- We will be moving curriculum forward during this closure. Content will focus on standards and skills that are deemed most essential to deepen student understanding of topics to best prepare them for the remainder of this school year and the next school year.
- Students can expect between 2-3 hours of schoolwork each day depending on the grade level. This work will include student supports and accommodations to assist students as needed.
- Weekly assignments will be released no later than Monday morning at 8:30 a.m. for the week.
- Teachers will provide "due dates" for assignments. We want to provide the structure of a schedule for student learning, but understand that an extension may be necessary without penalty.
- Students will be held accountable for completing and submitting the assigned lessons.
- Teachers will communicate their availability via email or Google Classroom, Schoology, Pearson Classroom or other district-approved learning platform that teachers have been using.
- Special education teachers and related service providers will be contacting families and students individually to support students and to provide resources as needed. Teleconferencing and counseling supports through our School Adjustment Counselors and School Psychologists are also available. Communications between our regular education teachers, special education teachers, and related service providers teams will be ongoing and consistent to best meet the needs of our students.
- High School and Middle School remote learning schedules will be emailed to all students and families and posted on the school websites.
- SMS and SBRHS will move to a modified grading rubric based on participation and level of understanding of essential content and skills.
- At the high school and middle school levels, teachers will be available during the class period and Blue Raider Block/Raider Time unless the teacher posts other options.
- Elementary remote learning schedules will be coordinated directly through teachers.

- Educators will be providing feedback to students when appropriate
- SPS and SBRHS will continue to provide grab-and-go breakfasts and lunches for students who qualify for free or reduced-price lunches. These meals will be available for pick-up at North Elementary School.

Student and Parent/Guardian Remote Learning Expectations

Students

1. Students must check their school email accounts regularly.
2. Students must check into Google Classrooms, Schoology, and/or Pearson Classrooms, or other applicable learning platforms regularly.
3. Students should make every effort to complete assignments within the time allotted.
4. If a student has an issue (is sick, has an emergency, technical challenges), the student should communicate directly with their teacher in a timely manner.

Parents/Guardians

We ask that parents/guardians assist students in organizing their work and encouraging them to complete assignments from home. Parents / guardians will email the attendance administrative assistant at their child's school if their child will not be attending online learning for two or more days.

Feedback

This remote learning plan will be a work in progress. We are expecting questions and concerns that we have not yet thought of at this time. It is difficult to transform a learning environment from traditional to remote in a short time without unforeseen challenges. Following the implementation of our remote learning plan, we will seek feedback from students about their experiences and refine our plan as we learn what works best.

School Calendar

As of today, our scheduled return to school date is Monday, May 4, 2020. However, if reports from epidemiologists and other health experts are any indication, this school closure may extend beyond that date. Regardless of when we return to school the last day of this school year will be Monday, June 22.

Some parents have asked whether we will have virtual school/remote-learning expectations during April vacation (April 20-24). This is an entirely new way of teaching and learning to which none of us are accustomed. While many teachers already utilize Google Classroom, Schoology, and other resources such as video conferencing and screen-casting with students, they are not used daily as the primary method to deliver instruction. Teachers have been working very hard as have our students. With projections of COVID-19 cases reaching a peak in several weeks, our students and teachers will need to separate from their devices, rest, and focus on their physical and emotional health so that everyone is ready for a successful May and June. April vacation will remain part of our approved school calendar.

Assessments, Grading, and Report Cards

SBRHS Terms 3 and 4 Grades/Report Cards

Students' term 3 grades will be determined by the period from January 23 through Friday, March 13, 2020, which was the last day students were in the school building. Students will have until Sunday, April 26, 2020 to complete and submit all term three assignments to their teachers. Work assigned from April 6, 2020 through the end of the year will make up the student's term 4 grade. Teachers will provide students with guidelines or criteria for success for student assignments. Teachers will use a common rubric as a model to assess assignments in two (2) categories: participation and mastery of essential content and skills. Students will be held accountable for completing and submitting the assigned lessons.

There will be no final exams at the end of this school year. Due to this change, the weighting of terms will be modified as follows: Terms 1-4 will each count as 23% of the student's final grade. The mid-year examination will count as 8% of the final grade.

Somerset Middle School Terms 3 and 4 Grades/Report Cards

Somerset Middle School term 3 graded work ended on Friday, March 13, 2020, the last day we were in school. Students who owed work or needed additional time were given the opportunity to complete the work prior to April 2, 2020 (end of term 3). If a student needs additional time, please reach out to the teacher. Report cards for term 3 will be available on Aspen around April 7. If a student completes and submits work after April 2, the teacher can do a grade override.

Work assigned during this closure through the end of the year will make up the student's term 4 grade. Teachers will assess students' assignments using the remote learning rubric, which focuses on two (2) categories: participation and mastery of essential content and skills (level of understanding). Students will be held accountable for completing and submitting the assigned lessons.

Elementary Report Cards for Trimester 2

Report cards for the second trimester, which ended on March 12, are available to parents and guardians for the first time through the Aspen parent portal. Information and procedures for parents/guardians to log in to Aspen and to access these report cards were emailed earlier this week. If families are having trouble accessing this information you can email the building principal for assistance.

MCAS

On March 20, 2020, US Department of Education announced that students impacted by school closures due to COVID-19 can bypass standardized testing for the 2019-2020 school year. Upon a state's request, the US Department of Education will grant a waiver to any state that is unable to assess its students due to the ongoing pandemic, removing the federally mandated testing requirements for this school year. Additional legislative action by the State of Massachusetts and a formal request by DESE are required to take advantage of this waiver. DESE has submitted the waiver to the US Department of Education and is awaiting an official response as well as legislative action in Massachusetts.

Advanced Placement (AP) Exams and SATs

The College Board recently provided an update regarding Advanced Placement exams and SATs including:

- The May 2 administration of the SAT has been canceled. Students who registered for this assessment will receive refunds from the College Board.
- Traditional face-to-face AP exam administrations will not take place. Students will take their exams online. Please click [here](#) to be directed to the College Board website for more information.

Senior Class Information

1. Community Service: If you have completed your community service hours, please follow the directions on somersetberkley.org and input your hours into Aspen. Take a picture of your paperwork and email it to Mrs. Farias in the main office: fariasj@sbregional.org. If you have not completed your community service hours, please email Mrs. Farias and let her know. She will provide you with an alternate option to this requirement.
2. Attendance Appeals: If you lost credit in your class, please email Dr. Brelsford and request your appeal. This will be done via a virtual Google Hangout meeting.
3. Final Exams: There will be no final exams.
4. Prom & Graduation: If school returns to session on May 4, 2020, the prom and graduation ceremony will continue as planned. If school is postponed further, every effort will be made to reschedule the prom and graduation ceremony.

5. High school seniors at risk of not graduating are a concern for all public schools. DESE is aware of the issue and will be issuing guidance to districts.

Special Education and English Learners

Given the complex nature of special education instruction and the evolving guidance from the US Department of Education and DESE regarding special education over the past three weeks a separate communication addressing the delivery of special education services is forthcoming.

English Learner (ELs) teachers will be reaching out to families in our program to discuss their plan to offer remote learning and to provide support to students and their families.

Technology

In the Somerset Public Schools and Somerset Berkley Regional High School, many teachers use [Google Classroom](#), [Google Sites](#), and other [G Suite](#) tools with their students and classes. Some of these additional tools that teachers will be using include [Google Hangouts Meet](#), [Google Hangouts Chat](#), and [Screencastify](#). Some of these tools have video conferencing capability and are part of the G Suite communication tools that can help us all stay connected to one another.

The Somerset Public Schools deployed approximately 100 Chromebooks to students in grades 1-7 over the past two weeks. Families who received these Chromebooks responded to a survey that was sent from each principal. If you are in the position of working from home while students are also completing and submitting work online and you do not have a sufficient number of devices, please respond to the survey that was sent about one week ago. On April 1-2, we distributed these devices to parents/guardians via a “drive through” system that does not require them to leave their vehicles when picking up devices. We will offer another round of pickups in the next week or two.

Comcast is offering free Internet service to new customers for 60 days to families in need. To find more information regarding Comcast’s Internet Essentials program, click [here](#). Several cellular service providers are also providing more support due to the COVID-19 outbreak:

- [Verizon](#) is giving families additional mobile data and waiving fees for its low-income internet program;
- [TMobile](#) is allowing customers to access more mobile data;
- [AT&T](#) is waiving data overage charges; and
- [Sprint](#) is improving mobile data access.

We face much uncertainty over the coming weeks. What I am certain of are the dedication and passion of our faculty and staff and the grit and determination of our students as they work through this unique situation. If you have questions, concerns, or feedback please email your building principal so we can continue to improve our remote learning plan. We miss our students and we will work diligently to maintain connections with them and to continue their learning during the school closure. Everyone in the Somerset Public Schools and Somerset Berkley Regional School District wish you continued patience, good health, and happiness in the days and weeks ahead.

Sincerely,

Jeffrey Schoonover

Superintendent
Somerset Public Schools
Somerset Berkley Regional School District