



# GATEWAY REGIONAL SCHOOL DISTRICT

BLANDFORD · CHESTER · HUNTINGTON · MIDDLEFIELD · MONTGOMERY · RUSSELL  
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## Superintendent's Corner

March 27, 2020

As we complete our second week of not having students in school, there has been an ever-increasing number of questions asked of state and federal officials that have resulted in several recommendations from the DESE. I'm pleased to say that as a district, we are already well-positioned in terms of meeting—and often exceeding—these recommendations regarding offering remote learning opportunities for our students. This speaks well to our dedicated staff members who have, often with difficulty and much work, shifted from classroom instruction and assistance to remote learning. Additionally, our staff that does so much to support our students with additional needs have stepped up to the task using various communication strategies.

Support staff—secretaries, custodians, cafeteria staff, nurses, central office staff, security staff, technology staff, and maintenance staff—have also stepped up to the plate to continue to provide the necessary services to keep the district running, even under these difficult circumstances.

While we do not know when we'll be allowed to have students return to the brick and mortar classroom, the work students are doing now will (per DESE guidelines) count towards the completion of the current year, towards promotion and graduation, and towards their credits for each class. While we don't know the extent of how much progress is being made until we're able to return students to school, we already know that we'll face a difficult challenge of making up for the time students are not working face to face with staff.

Following DESE guidelines, we will also be following our current school calendar and going to the planned 185th day. April vacation will still be honored so there will be no school assignments that week as well as no "grab and go" meals. Staff will renew remote learning—and meals—on the Monday following April break (April 27th). We are also planning on the last day of school being Wednesday, June 17th (our 185th day).

While we are still unsure of the status of this year's MCAS testing, we do know that the state is seeking flexibility to delay, modify, or even cancel, this year's MCAS. We also know that the state is only counting attendance (another factor in ranking schools) until the Governor decided schools would be closed and comparing that to the same time frame from last year for the comparison rankings.

I have been asked whether towns will get a "refund" of unexpended funds that some believe should be adding up without students in the buildings. State law and regulations around the district's Excess and Deficiency Account already provide for this eventuality, as it does in every other year. Any unexpended funds at the end of a fiscal year are moved into the E&D account, as certified by the state. Then, any amount in the E&D in excess of 5% of the total budget must go back to the towns and historically, the district also uses part of this account each year to decrease town assessments. We do not believe there will be an immense amount of unexpended funds because the staff is still working and getting their standard pay and benefits, the "grab and go" meals will likely put the cafeteria into a deficit, utilities may see some savings but utility costs are generally lower at this

time of the year anyway, and transportation savings may not be large either because any reduction in transportation costs the district sees will be directly offset by a loss of transportation reimbursement from the state. At this point, we are still waiting for additional clarification and decisions around transportation with the state suggesting that we work on putting the buses to an alternate use and negotiating some sort of payment plan with the transportation company based upon their reduced use of fuel and driver hours.

The pandemic has changed everyone's lives significantly in the short term and we all face a degree of uncertainty regarding the next few weeks. I thank everyone for their patience and understanding regarding the district's work on continuing services to all of our students.