

# WAYLAND \* PUBLIC \* SCHOOLS

April 2, 2020

Dear Families:

I hope that you are faring well in spite of the significant challenges and disruptions to our usual lives. With last week's announcement from Governor Baker that school closures have been extended to May 4, I imagine that many of you are wondering how this change affects our district's current approach to remote learning.

## **Wayland Remote Learning, Phase 1: March 19-April 7**

If you remember, during the first phase of this closure from March 12 to April 6, the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE), envisioned a three-week closure. At this time, DESE provided guidance (Please see [Commissioner's Guidance, March 13, 2020](#)) that directed districts to develop a learning plan that focused on review or a deeper study of concepts already taught. DESE explicitly told districts that these closure days would not be considered school days. I explained the remote learning model during the first phase of school closure ("[Wayland's Learning Model, Phase One](#)") in a letter I sent on March 17. In it, I described how Wayland would "focus on helping students review and practice existing knowledge and skills, or on providing optional curricular enrichment."

## **Wayland Remote Learning Model, Phase 2: April 13-May 4**

After Governor Baker announced on March 25 that Massachusetts schools would continue to be closed until May 4, DESE shifted its guidance. (Please see "[March 26 DESE Remote Learning Recommendations During COVID-19 School Closure](#)" and "[March 30 DESE Letter to Families COVID-19](#)") During phase two of the closure, DESE has given school districts leeway to move curricula forward at a deliberate pace, acknowledging that in this remote environment students would only receive some of the support they usually receive and that this support would be delivered through a remote format.

The Administrative Leadership team (Central Office and building-based administrators), with the support of the School Committee, has worked over the past week to develop phase two, which will begin on April 13. While the plan is to implement this model through May 4th, we fully recognize that a longer closure is possible. We have designed the plan to provide the framework for student learning beyond the current May 4th date.

Phase two of the model reflects the best thinking of our staff about how to structure meaningful learning opportunities for students within the context of a global health crisis that has interrupted all norms of teaching and learning. As we learn more details about how this pandemic impacts daily life, our first priority is supporting the well-being of our students and staff. Taking careful note of the emotional needs of students, teachers will move curricula forward at a moderate pace where appropriate.

Additionally, while the plan embraces our desire to help students progress, it also acknowledges that this model is new and unexpected for students, many of whom may encounter challenges and differing degrees of success in

this remote setting than they are used to achieving in a classroom setting. The plan also attempts to moderate the amount of screen time for students, particularly at the younger ages. Finally, it prioritizes connections between students and staff, acknowledging that, during this health crisis, more basic needs will at times take priority over learning and that our students will often crave emotional support. We describe specific details of what forward progress will look like at the different academic levels in the FAQ section that follows.

In order to enable teachers to plan for this shift thoughtfully, we will give them additional time to prepare both individually and in teams. **As a result, we will continue with phase one enrichment instruction on April 6 and 7. On April 8 and 9, we will not be providing enrichment activities to give teachers time to engage in planning and professional development in order to prepare for implementation of this new phase beginning on April 13. In addition, Wayland will proceed with our regularly scheduled vacation day, April 10, and will have April vacation from April 20-24. We will not be running instruction nor assigning work to students during these times.**

Parents and guardians, we appreciate that without any warning, you are involved more heavily in your children's learning. The impact of remote learning will differ for every student. Teachers are going through this process for the first time and are working hard to create meaningful learning opportunities. Please reach out to your children's teachers to let them know how things are going. **We also ask that you read the ["Parent Notice of Remote Learning"](#) so that you can fully participate in the remote learning experiences.**

What follows are answers to what we think will be commonly asked questions about Phase 2. Principals will provide additional building-specific details in upcoming communications. As always, feel free to contact me with additional questions at [arthur\\_unobskey@wayland.k12.ma.us](mailto:arthur_unobskey@wayland.k12.ma.us).

Before closing, I would like to specifically acknowledge the class of 2020 whose long-awaited final semester of high school has been impacted so significantly. My oldest son, a senior in college, feels a similar disappointment. The end of this year also marks an important milestone for our fifth and eighth graders. Please know that the staff is thinking creatively about how we can recognize and celebrate the accomplishments of these students, and that we are very proud of them.

Before his team took the field against a tough opponent, Coach Taylor, on *Friday Night Lights* would say, "[Clear eyes, full hearts, can't lose.](#)" We will get through this time with clear, open communication, a heartfelt compassion for our entire community, and a patient determination to take on each challenge together.

Please be well.

All my best,

*Arthur Unobskey*

Arthur Unobskey, Superintendent  
Wayland Public Schools

## **FAQs regarding The Wayland Remote Learning Model**

### **What does “academic progress” look like at each level between April 13 and May 4?**

#### **At the Preschool Level:**

At TCW, our primary focus will continue to focus on the health and well-being of all children, families, and staff and on supporting and nurturing relationships. We believe that by supporting parents and guardians, we are equipping those best positioned to support your young children while they are at home. Any new content that teachers suggest will build on experiences children have already had at school. We are developing a format that is “curriculum web-based,” with primarily open-ended activities that relate to a specific theme. Our play-based philosophy is particularly suited to this moment, because learning can happen anywhere; during a guided discovery walk in the woods, indoors building with blocks, and creating with recycled materials. By tapping into children’s natural curiosity we hope to support continued exploration, creativity, growth, and learning.

#### **At the Elementary level**

At the elementary level, learning will build upon the enrichment framework begun on March 19 and, in addition, will provide flexibility for teachers to carefully fold in new content. In doing so, we recognize the fact that our younger students are heavily dependent on adults in the home to support them in their learning, and that we want to provide multiple learning opportunities that do not depend on “screen time.” Teachers will not depend solely on computer-based learning but will integrate the students’ natural surroundings into their lessons where appropriate. We expect that students will spend no more than 3 ½ hours each day involved in remote education activities. Learning experiences will tend to emphasize reading, extended application of existing math skills, open-ended investigations in social studies and science, the use of existing technologies for skills practice (e.g., Lexia, Symphony Math, IXL Math), and continued weekly participation in specialized activities (art, music, library, technology, and physical education).

#### **At the Middle School level**

At the middle school level, learning will shift from “enrichment only” to “making some academic progress” with a recognition that different students will not have all of the support from school that they typically access. During this time of closure, content teams at each grade level will address those standards that they feel are most critical and accessible in the remote learning environment. Based on DESE guidance, we will continue to focus on deepening previously taught skills, but we will do so through the vehicle of new content. During phase two, teachers will plan collaboratively to identify common routines that can be implemented across classrooms. Beginning April 13, work will no longer be categorized as “optional,” and instead we will be expecting students to attempt assignments and projects to the best of their ability. We expect that students will spend approximately 3 ½ hours each day involved in remote education activities.

#### **At the High School level**

In Phase 2, high school students will have learning experiences that feature some new material and development of new skills, although with a modified pace and content that reflects our commitment to equity and access. While this pace acknowledges the greater independence of our older students, it also calls for a far more simple and flexible approach than usual given that remote learning is very different and new for most teachers and students.

Teachers will work closely together to narrow *what* is taught, the skills and content, to that which is crucial and accessible for students through remote instruction. Teachers who share courses will also work towards a more common approach in *how* they teach skills and content in order to ensure that expectations are straightforward and improve our ability to provide students with appropriate support remotely.

In Phase 2 of our learning model, teachers will assign learning tasks expecting that students will complete them. That said, we recognize that some students and families will be challenged in staying engaged in schoolwork. Our Student Study Team will help to monitor and support students who cannot complete learning tasks. We expect that students will spend approximately 3 ½ hours Monday through Friday involved in remote education activities.

## **Will students be graded? How will student performance be communicated?**

### **At the Elementary level**

Given the limited access to prior student work and the logistical difficulty of scheduling conferences, we have decided not to hold elementary parent-teacher conferences this spring. That said, if parents are concerned about children's progress they should reach out to their classroom teacher who would be happy to respond regarding their progress. In an upcoming email, we will identify a time-line for providing appropriate feedback to parents regarding student work.

### **At the Secondary Level**

The Commissioner, in the guidance cited above, recommended that secondary schools provide credit/no credit grades during phase two because typical accountability measures will not accurately reflect student progress or effort in these highly unusual circumstances. We agree with this recommendation.

- **Middle School Level:** At the middle school level, students will receive a **pass/no grade for third quarter and for the portion of the fourth quarter encompassed in the closure**. This approach speaks to the desire to recognize the efforts of middle school students to engage and progress in their learning. Those students who do not successfully complete enough of the expected work to earn a passing grade will receive "No Grade," rather than a failing grade. Because we know that a range of factors (access to services, technology challenges, health challenges, etc.) may have inhibited the work necessary to earn a passing grade, "No Grade" seemed to be the fairest, most honest assessment option available during these extraordinary times. We will send home quarter grades through eSchool on our regularly scheduled timeline.
- **High School level:** At the high school level, students will receive a combined **pass/fail grade for both the third quarter and all of fourth quarter regardless of when or whether we return to school**. Although the High School staff expect students to complete the tasks that their teachers assign, they acknowledge that some students may need to excuse themselves for periods of time if members of their family become ill or if they face other challenges as a result of school closures. In addition, progress may be uneven for students. Remote learning, for example, may be difficult particularly for those students who achieve more success in a dynamic face-to-face learning environment. Given these complexities, a pass/fail grade is the most appropriate.

Given the nature of the remote experience, our Middle and High School teachers will focus on assigning formative assessments in which students receive feedback on their progress while doing instructional activities. Students will take few, if any, summative assessments in which they are asked to integrate large swaths of information and integrate a number of skill sets. In addition, the High School will not be giving final exams in June. We feel that this approach will balance our belief that most students should be able to complete some learning, but may not have sufficient intellectual and emotional bandwidth during this closure for high-stakes assessments or grades.

Please note that the High School is currently working to develop a solution for accounting for year-end grade point averages and will detail their approach in an upcoming communication.

### **How will instruction be delivered?**

In this unprecedented and constantly changing situation, we are constructing a new teaching and learning experience which we hope will serve our students well. Teachers will be providing a blend of asynchronous and synchronous instruction. Synchronous instruction (for example, through live video-conferencing) provides tremendous benefits, particularly when it comes to maintaining social-emotional connections. Nevertheless synchronous instruction brings many challenges. Not all students will be able to access synchronous instruction to the same extent. In order to participate in effective instruction while addressing privacy concerns, both students and teachers need a high level of technical skill and interpersonal trust. In addition, there is a very real possibility that Wayland teachers may need to deal with illnesses in their families, thus limiting their ability to provide regular synchronous instruction.

As a result, teachers will strive for synchronous check-ins with students to the extent possible and practicable, typically occurring at least once per week. At the elementary and middle school levels, synchronous instruction will primarily focus on social-emotional goals, giving students and teachers the opportunity to interact, check-in, and maintain connections. At the high school level, synchronous instruction will focus on both academic and social-emotional goals.

Ultimately, because of the challenges in delivering synchronous learning activities, instruction will primarily be delivered asynchronously. Teachers will be working in teams to the greatest extent possible to ensure that, if illnesses prevent teachers from being available for periods of time, their teams can continue to keep students engaged. Teachers of older elementary, middle and high school students will typically deliver their asynchronous assignments, activities, and expectations to students electronically on a predetermined schedule. Each building principal will communicate those schedules to you.

### **How will special education services be delivered?**

During this period of closure the school district will not be able to provide all services in the manner that they are typically provided pursuant to your students' IEP. However, we will provide a free and appropriate public education (FAPE) by using a variety of different resources that may include, but are not limited to, virtual, online, email or by telephone, seeking creative ways to provide special education instruction and related services to the extent feasible.

The school staff with whom you are already familiar will continue to provide your special education services during this period of closure. We recognize that special education service delivery is as unique as the students who receive it during regular school operations. We can therefore, reasonably assume, that the same will hold true while our school buildings are closed. Special education staff will maintain regular contact with you and your student in an effort to retain some sense of continuity and structure. They will also work to make sure that educational opportunities offered to the general student population, including enrichment activities and resources, will be made accessible to students with disabilities. Richard Whitehead, our Director of Student Services, will be providing more extensive guidance to the parents, guardians and caregivers of our students who currently receive support and services through an IEP. This information will be emailed directly to families and will be posted on the Student Services section of the Wayland Public Schools website.