



WissNation – Family Update on April 15

A Focus on Teaching & Learning

April 15, 2020

Hello, Wissahickon Parents/Guardians,

It has been just over a month now since schools closed on March 13th, and while it has only been a month, it does seem like an eternity. Our new “normal” doesn’t feel quite so comfortable as it has required all of us to figure out new ways of doing things, meeting the needs of everyone in the household, keeping up with the demands of working from home, sharing technology devices, and tending to our students’ daily lessons.

In this Family Update, I want to share with you the various aspects of our teaching and learning plan that will take us through June. This plan has been developed collaboratively by our school and district leaders, and it has three primary goals: *to provide our students with a sound learning plan focused on the most essential skills and concepts remaining in this year’s curriculum; to use a consistent set of technology tools that our school has vetted and can support; and to take into account the need for flexibility given all that you are trying to balance at home during this pandemic.*

Asynchronous Learning

Upon the students’ return to school on Monday this week, teachers are providing students across the district with asynchronous learning opportunities. Examples of such lessons include the following: pre-recorded mini-lessons by the teacher; video clips; interactive shared reading experiences; teacher-narrated PowerPoint slideshows; teacher-recorded videos; and strategically-selected online programs such as Reflex Math, First-in-Math, and Khan Academy. Our teachers will continue to include asynchronous learning opportunities in their daily lessons as these also provide students and families a great deal of flexibility in planning a day’s learning.

Synchronous Learning

Special education faculty have provided delivery of special education services through synchronous learning for a couple of weeks now. Synchronous learning will gradually be expanded as an available option for the rest of our faculty based on the following timeline:

- Week of April 20TH: ESL Specialists/groups (K-12), Reading Specialists/groups (K-8), Advanced Placement Teachers of AP courses only (10-12).
- Week of April 27TH: K-5 Classroom Teachers and All Secondary Teachers (6-12)

Elementary Level: At the *elementary* level (K-5), the classroom teachers will host a Weekly Check-in Meeting with their classes. This will be a time for the teacher to connect with students, share positive messages, and provide a preview of the week’s learning. In addition, the elementary teachers will incorporate some small group synchronous learning opportunities where the teacher can provide strategic and differentiated instruction to meet students’ learning needs. These lessons will be scheduled in advance of the session with the date, time, and link shared ahead of time.

Secondary Level: At the *secondary* level (6-12), the teachers will include some whole class synchronous learning opportunities in addition to the asynchronous format. For some classes, it will make sense for the teacher to meet synchronously with small groups of students. Synchronous lessons provide an opportunity

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for the teacher to interact with students in order to introduce and/or expand upon new concepts and skills. Again, these lessons would be scheduled in advance so that students know when to attend.

Virtual Classroom Norms: Just like in the “real” classroom, the “virtual” classroom requires an agreed upon set of norms so that all students can benefit from the instruction. These norms will be reviewed with students at the outset of the lesson. Tomorrow, I will be sending to all Wissahickon families a document entitled, “WSD – Maintaining Confidentiality & Video-Conferencing – Guidelines and Expectations.” Parents should take the time to read this letter and share with their child(ren) the importance of following the “virtual classroom norms” as explained by the teacher.

Teacher Office Hours

Each day, our teachers set aside time in their day to communicate with parents/students using e-mail, Schoology messages, and as necessary through scheduling a conference through Microsoft Teams. Teacher Office Hours is the time for parents or students to have their questions answered or misunderstandings clarified. It is also a time for the teacher to help the student or a small group of students with their work. If the concern is not satisfactorily addressed via e-mail, the parent (elementary level) or student or parent (secondary level) should ask the teacher to set up a conference. The teacher will notify the parent by e-mail to confirm that a conference has been scheduled at a specific date and time. One additional note - outside of the teacher’s office hours and regular school hours, teachers will respond to e-mails within 24 hours.

As I conclude this week’s *Families Update*, I want to acknowledge that there are widely differing opinions as to what should be our district’s approach to remote teaching and learning. In developing a plan to meet the needs of nearly 5,000 students across the district, there are many considerations, some of which include the family’s availability of technology devices, access to the internet, the needs of working parents, the number of children sharing devices, and the needs of our youngest learners who often require an adult to work alongside them. We are not just planning for remote teaching and learning, but we are planning for remote teaching and learning during an unprecedented event that has forced upon all of us a new and mostly uncomfortable environment.

I encourage you to continue to reach out to your child(ren)’s teachers if we can be more supportive of your child’s learning. While we have established our overall approach to remote teaching and learning to guide us through June, there are minor adjustments that we will need to make as time marches on. We are listening to you and will do our best to make decisions that meet the needs of our overall community.

Thank you for your continued support of our teachers and their efforts to deliver an engaging educational program for our students. In the meantime, make sure that your family stays healthy and remains safe.

Regards,



Dr. Gary W. Abbamont
Assistant Superintendent of Schools
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