



PAUL CUFFEE SCHOOL

A Maritime Charter School for Providence Youth

Dear Families:

April 27, 2020

I hope you are all remaining safe and healthy. By now you've heard that schools in Rhode Island will stay closed for the remainder of the school year due to COVID-19, announced a few days ago at Governor Raimondo's press briefing. Distance learning will continue in Rhode Island for the remainder of the school year. I share Gov. Raimondo and Commissioner Infante-Green's enthusiasm for our distance learning efforts. Learning has continued in some fashion, thanks to the hard work of our students, teachers, and families. Still, it isn't easy, and I recognize that this situation is causing significant challenges for many of you at home.

If you are experiencing challenges meeting basic needs such as food and shelter then you can call the United Way hotline at "211." Also, our school social workers are able to help you. Please call the school and follow the prompts to leave a message for the school social worker. For children experiencing significant difficulty, please reach out to Kids Link Rhode Island, 1-855-543-5465, a free and confidential hotline for parents and caregivers of children who are feeling excessive anger or sadness; lashing out at siblings, friends and adults; having behavior problems; having severe worries; or, hurting himself/herself or others. Also, the Highlander Institute has set up a new resource for families who need extra help with distance learning. Visit <https://highlanderinstitute.org/distance-learning-helpline/> or call 1-904-414-4927.

The amount of learning seems to be varying considerably. For students doing well prior to school closure we are seeing similar rates of success. Some students who were having difficulty prior to school closure are doing well with distance learning. These students are taking advantage of the reduced workload to make up missing assignments. Unfortunately, some students who were not doing well prior to school closure are also not doing well with distance learning. In these cases, students continue to avoid schoolwork or submit assignments. Making progress during the distance learning experience has been a real challenge for some.

No matter your level of success or challenge with this distance learning I want you to know that *we are in this together*. We are coming back to school next year, and we are going to need to make sure that everyone has the resources and support they need in order to acquire the knowledge and skills for the next grade level. All that is expected right now is for everyone to do their best, whatever that means for you at any given day or time. Admit that there are times when you can't do your best and when that happens don't beat yourself up over it. Ask for help. Maybe you've become sick, or a family member is sick. Maybe you're working, and you're depending on others to help with distance learning. Maybe you don't have anyone to help out at

home. Remember, just do your best. At the end of this pandemic you will still have a school that will do everything it can to help your child learn what's required. For some who are completing no work during this time it might mean staying back in the same grade. We hope to prevent that by continuing to reach out to these students and by providing support over the summer months. Still, if a student is not completing work during this distance learning period then staying back a grade may still be necessary.

As mentioned by Governor Raimondo last week, the state is adopting a new calendar for the remainder of the school year. Here are the highlights:

- No distance learning on Wednesday, May 6, this will be a teacher professional day
- No distance learning on Friday, May 15, this will be a vacation day
- No distance learning on Wednesday, May 20, this will be a teacher professional day
- No distance learning on Monday, May 25, this is the Memorial Day holiday
- No distance learning on Monday, June 1, this will be a teacher professional day
- The last day of school will be Wednesday, June 17

As I mentioned, distance learning has had its challenges. I am not naive to think that distance learning will adequately prepare all students for the next grade or course. Researchers are predicting that schools could see a loss of 50% or more of the academic content, and it could be worse in some grades. Our school is working to provide a strong post-pandemic plan so that we can assist all children once we reopen our doors. In the meantime I'd like to provide some direction to our parents and caregivers during this lengthy distance learning situation. The goal of all learning is to foster independence and teachers are designing lessons and activities for which they can predict 85-90% success when done independently. When students need help they often need someone to show them how to start, to check their work, and to give them reminders about expectations. I have had to do this with my own children. In my house we often set a timer and then I check in with my kids when the timer is up. I am not ashamed to admit it but for my son I give him an hour of XBOX time for every hour of school work time. Some days I double it and he gets two hours for every hour of work. That might not work for your family because every child responds differently, but I've found it helpful to mark the time on task and to set reasonable expectations.

One pleasant result of all of this is that my children are reading more than they've ever read before. Reading remains the most important activity children can do to advance their learning. If you need access to books then please reach out to your child's teacher or advisor. There are several websites we are using that provide online access to books, and we can assist you in setting up a public library account.

Perhaps the most important aspect of distance learning is the social and emotional component. Connection to classmates and teachers provides children with a sense of normalcy. Students should be checking into advisory, attending Google hangouts, and visiting teacher office hours. Having this connection to school is important to a child's well being because it's a connection to the people we saw every day prior to the pandemic, and to which we will return after this is over.

To the members of the senior class, we are truly sorry that you will miss out on the celebrations that students have had in years past and will have in the future. This isn't fair. I know that there can be no substitute for your prom, senior dinner and graduation; however, I promise that we will honor you and your classmates in some fashion, and we have a team working on those plans right now. It is a sad irony that this senior class, one of the strongest academic cohorts we've had, will be impacted in this way. We know this class to be strong and resilient and we are all very proud of your efforts.

Eventually, life will return to normal for all of us. The next seven weeks of distance learning will be a challenge but we'll get through it, and we will be a stronger community on the other end. In the meantime I wish you all good health during these difficult times.

Yours truly,
Chris Haskins