

Mount Vernon Families:

Now that the school closure has extended to at least April 30th, the District is adding learning activities for students to access. These activities will allow for more contact between the teachers and students, and will involve learning activities connected to the District's curriculum and learning standards. After much deliberation and consultation between the administrative team, staff members, and the members of the Mount Vernon School Board, the decision has been made to continue to make these learning activities voluntary for students. **While these learning activities may be voluntary, it is our expectation all students will engage in these learning activities with their teachers. It is important for students to engage in these activities as best as possible in order to be prepared to return to school when the time comes. Additionally, seniors will have the opportunity to learn key skills and concepts that would have been addressed during the fourth quarter.** The decision to maintain the learning activities as voluntary is based on the following reasons:

1. It will be difficult for students and staff to learn how to effectively use an online platform in a short period of time. While students and staff have some familiarity with the Google learning platform, it will take time and training to get students and staff up to speed on how to effectively use the platform.
2. It will be difficult to ensure all students will be able to equitably access the learning activities and supports. For example:
 - Students who receive services via IEPs and 504 plans will not be able to receive the level of services remotely, they normally receive in person.
 - While the District has offered computers and Internet access to all students in need of these, the District has no way of knowing if everyone has full online access.
 - According to the Iowa Department of Education, districts who wish to require students in online and remote learning must guarantee "work is equivalent in effort and rigor to typical classroom work." While the District's teachers are highly skilled in delivering curriculum in a variety of ways; given time constraints and limitations with an online platform, it will be difficult to ensure remote learning will meet the criteria of being equivalent to effort and rigor in typical classroom work.
 - Many students have had to take on greater responsibilities during this time, including assisting with child care of siblings. This lessens the quality and quantity of time some students can devote to engagement in the learning activities, and poses another potential equity issue for students.
 - Many teachers have had to take on greater responsibilities during this time, including taking care of children and, in many cases, taking care of other family members including their own parents. This lessens the time and attention teachers have to engage in quality assessment and grading of work completed by the students.

- When in the regular school setting, students who are struggling have daily access to teachers in person as well as having access to structured interventions. While students and teachers are still able to communicate with one another remotely, the level of intervention support is decreased for students when not in the regular school setting.
 - The COVID-19 crisis, and its impact on school, is something out of the control of students. Therefore, students should not be punished academically in any way because of a crisis that was not of their making. Requiring student involvement in learning, with inherent inequities that potentially exist, puts some students at risk for not being able to meet the academic requirements.
3. In looking at both options, the District is most focused on increasing engagement in learning for students while not placing the challenges of following a required track on our students, staff, and families.

Moving forward, in addition to the learning activities already shared with students, teachers will use any of the following tools to engage students in learning:

1. Live Zoom or Google Hangout sessions
2. Podcasts of class material
3. Recorded video lessons
4. PowerPoint presentations of lessons sent via student email
5. Assigning the viewing of a third party video viewing (e.g., Khan Academy)
6. Class assignments like writing prompts, math/science problems, etc.
7. Teachers reading to students

The principals from the three schools will communicate this week with families as to how to access the new learning activities moving forward. Students in grades 5-12 will need to be ready to receive important information through their District email accounts. Students should know their email accounts, but if they do not it is simply the full first name, followed by the full last name, followed by @mvcsd.org (e.g., joesmith@mvcsd.org). Additionally, we will need to secure parental permission for your children to engage in live learning sessions via platforms like Zoom, so please be looking for information on that from the schools. Once these new activities get rolling, please contact us if you are having any issues with accessing the learning activities.

In addition to the lunches that are available to all students Monday through Friday at Davis Park, the District has been providing additional food support to families in need through donations of items from community members. If you are in need of such food support, please contact Kate Stanton, Washington Elementary Principal, at kstanton@mvcsd.org.

Thanks again for your patience and persistence as we work through this situation together!