



April 14, 2020

Dear Portland Public Schools families,

April vacation begins this Friday, April 17. Before the break starts, I want to update you on plans for when we return to finish the rest of the school year through remote learning.

First, I want to start by telling you about our new [FAQ page](#). We know many families have questions during this COVID-19 crisis on all kinds of topics. You'll find the answers to the most commonly asked questions on this page. It will be regularly updated with additional questions and answers and the latest information as needed.

Here are the details on plans for finishing the school year in remote learning mode:

**Grading expectations:** We're making a grading change for the fourth quarter/ third trimester. These changes reflect our recognition of disparities that students experience when it comes to online access and supports at home, and the many challenges that families and staff are facing as they strive to make remote learning work. Districts throughout the region and country are making similar changes.

I want to stress that this shift in grading is not about lowering our standards for students or decreasing teacher expectations. Instead, it is a way to respond to remote learning. Our teachers will continue to teach students to grade and course-level expectations and provide feedback on their work.

Students in kindergarten through grade 8 and at Casco Bay High School will receive a grade that says they have "met" or "not yet met" standards. Deering and Portland high schools will use the words "pass" or "insufficient evidence" as grades. At the high schools, the grading for this quarter/trimester will **not** be incorporated into GPAs.

**Weekly Instructional Schedule:** All schools, K-12, will adapt their schedules to provide four days of assignments and one day that will include targeted support, office hours and time for students to catch up and revise school assignments. At the high school level, the differentiated learning day will continue to be Wednesday. At the elementary and middle school level it will occur on Friday. You can expect to receive further details about this schedule from your child's school directly.

**Pre-K Connection:** We will engage pre-kindergarten students and families by providing optional resources online and in paper-based format, and by reaching out to connect with students on a regular basis, with interested families.

**End-of-year calendar:** I will be proposing to the Portland Board of Public Education on April 28 that the **five** snow days that normally would have been made up during the week of June 15 be used for teacher collaboration, reflection on our remote learning work and planning for next year. If approved, the last student day would be **June 11**. If this proposal is not approved, the last student day will be **June 18**.

*Starting on June 1 we will transition from whole class lessons to targeted support for students who are furthest behind. Teachers will focus on smaller groups of students on the standards and work that have already been taught. Students will be required to engage in this targeted learning support structure based on teacher/administration recommendation. For students who are meeting standards, we will offer optional learning activities, which families can choose to use with their children. Seniors will complete coursework per their regular schedule, unless they are missing credits/Units of Proficiency, in which case they will have additional time to meet the necessary standards to earn credit.*

*As you may know, our spring sports season and co-curriculars have been canceled, based on guidance and requirements from the state.*

***End-of-year rites of passage:*** *We've surveyed our high school seniors and they indicated overwhelmingly that they prefer in-person graduation to a virtual one. As such, we are scheduling high school graduation for the first week of August. That time frame, which of course is dependent on the lifting of COVID-19 social-distancing restrictions, creates the opportunity to gather and celebrate prior to most students leaving for college and careers in late August. Regarding other end-of-year activities, such as fifth- and eighth-grade graduation, we're working with individual schools to determine which events might be held virtually. We're also developing a plan to allow students who left items in school buildings to be able to retrieve them at the end of the school year.*

***Summer activities:*** *We are working to explore ways of offering additional summer supports for students. We will have more information in the near future.*

*I recognize that this will be a different April break. Still, I hope everyone is able to find safe ways to restore themselves during this break while respecting stay-at-home orders and physical distancing recommendations. And don't forget that, during the vacation, meals for students still will be provided from 10am-12pm on weekdays at our nine school sites. The only exception is the Patriot's Day holiday, Monday, April 20. Learn more about [food resources](#) for students and families.*

*Also, after April break, we plan to hold a virtual Parent University session for families on the topic of maintaining social/emotional health during this time. We'll post the details on [our website](#) soon.*

*I'll continue to update you about new developments once remote learning resumes on Monday, April 27. In the meantime, if you have any questions, you can call our Helpline at 874-8159 and leave a message in any of these languages: English, Acholi, Arabic, French, Khmer, Portuguese, Somali, Spanish, or Vietnamese. You can also leave a message in your primary language at [ppshelpline@portlandschools.org](mailto:ppshelpline@portlandschools.org).*

*Sincerely,*



*Xavier Botana, Superintendent*