



# RIDGEFIELD PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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*Susie Da Silva, Ed.D.*  
*Superintendent of Schools*

April 23, 2020

Greetings Families and Faculty,

Each day, I am reminded how this pandemic has impacted the lives of so many...near and far. The devastation can be felt through our digital walls. While the weeks ahead will be filled with plans and projections, I wanted to take a moment to let all of those reading this communication know, that nothing matters more than your health and well-being. We will continue to forge ahead, as that is our charge, but please know that at any time, you can lean into your school or the District. **You** come first, everything else comes after.

Despite the busyness of each day, I am finding the need to remind myself each morning of the day of the week, as the days seem to blend together. That being said, we are working to get some pep in our step! On Monday, we hope to launch a RPS challenge, to reignite our community a bit. Be on the lookout! You can also expect the launching of RPS' first Podcast "Ridgefield Tiger Talk"- a mystery guest will be invited to interview for this weekly Podcast.

The update below will serve as a follow-up to items described in my last communication, as well as the addition of a few more items.

Most importantly, be safe and healthy.

Warmly,

*Susie*

Susie Da Silva, Ed.D.

## COVID-19 Update

### Grading

During these unprecedented times, it has never been more important that we approach complex decisions like grading in a careful way. While the parameters of instruction have shifted, so have students' methods of engaging with curricular content, along with teachers' abilities to assess student thinking, understanding, and mastery of content.

The rationale and design to our K-5, 6-8, and 9-12 grading approaches (respectively) honors student and faculty efforts to maintain reasonable expectations and accountability, while also respecting the varied demands and home situations that students and families are dealing with right now. The District aims to ensure that the revised grading design for this school year does not place students at an unintended disadvantage as they make future decisions about their educational paths.

For each level, the following was kept into consideration:

- *Does this model apply equitably across all types of students, home situations, and courses/classes/grades?*
- *If schools were to reopen before the end of the school year, does this design allow for a smooth transition to finish the fourth quarter/second semester?*
- *Does this model continue to incentivize students to remain engaged?*
- *Does this model allow faculty and students/families to focus right now primarily on their interactions with one another and the curricular content?*

Linked [here](#) is our grading design for the distance learning period. Families will receive follow-up communication from their building administration with details of how the grading structure will be implemented.

### **eLearning**

We have received feedback from parents on the eLearning experience. Much of the communication that I have received has been requesting more 'live' teaching. New schedules will be distributed to families at the secondary level in the next couple of days. Mr. Creller and Dr. Hannaway will speak to the eLearning plan and its evolution at the Board of Education meeting on April 27, 2020.

Here are just a couple of highlights from the week:

- *RHS administrators and teachers designed a new [Senior Option Program](#). Embarking on a Senior Option will provide seniors with an opportunity for individual exploration and a useful transition from high school.*
- *Branchville Elementary School created two videos this week, you can find them here: "[We Miss You](#)" and [Hearts Across Ridgefield](#).*

### **Commissioner of Education Update**

The Commissioner's weekly conference call yesterday did not yield any new updates on the opening of school. However, the Commissioner did share with the Governor that the majority of school districts would prefer a decision on the opening of school sooner, rather than later. The Commissioner also discussed the creation of *Regional Advisory Teams* that will include parents, public health officials, teachers, Superintendents, and Board members. The charge of this team is to provide the Commissioner with recommendations and considerations on the reopening of schools.

## **Graduation**

Principal Gross sent out a communication to Seniors and their parents yesterday letting them know that the staff at RHS will begin planning for a virtual graduation. Should schools be reopened, RHS will plan for a traditional ceremony as best as possible.

## **Budget**

The District's Leadership Team continues to meet and discuss our current budget and the state of the budget for 2020-21. Our Special Education and Pupil Personnel team members are beginning to plan for ESY (virtual or physical) and unanticipated enrollment increases. We are also left to consider how distance learning may require different thinking and planning to best meet the needs of all students for the Fall 2020.

As you may remember, the Board of Education adopted a 2020-21 budget that called for a 3.96% increase; 2.96% of the 3.96% increase is required to maintain the current level of structure and programming. The 2.96% increase is primarily due to contractual obligations, transportation, and costs associated with special education.

That being said, we look forward to partnering with the Town and doing our part to support the wider community during this public health and economic crisis. A scheduled Tri-Board meeting will take place this evening, April 23, 2020. Public comment will be held at the start of the meeting.

## **Special Education**

Parents of students with IEPs who are transitioning between schools next year (i.e. pre-K to elementary, elementary to middle, middle to high) will receive information next Wednesday regarding how this planning will take place during the closure. This information will be sent specifically to those families who did not have the opportunity to plan for their child's special education program for their 2020-21 new school prior to school closing on March 13.

Separately, in the coming weeks, special education case managers will be reaching out to parents of students who did not have their Extended School Year eligibility status reviewed prior to school closing on March 13. Each student's case will be individually reviewed with parent input regarding the student's performance pre-closure, and since closing. Regardless of the state of the public health crisis, Extended School Year Programming will run this summer in person or virtually, and the District is planning for multiple contingencies depending on social distancing guidance at that time.

Parents are encouraged to contact Dr. Hannaway or Dr. Showah directly with questions about any topics related to special services generally, or specifically to their child's circumstances. Or, parents can filter questions/input through their PTA Special Services Representatives, who are meeting on a periodic basis with the special education administration to address parent feedback across the District.

