

## Weston School from Home Parent/Guardian Guidance Updated May 8, 2020

Dear families,

Hearing Governor Baker's April 24th announcement that schools will remain closed through June was tough for us. Although we knew that there was a distinct possibility that we would not return, we dearly hoped that we could come back at some point this year, reconnect with students and families face-to-face, and celebrate together significant end-of-year milestones -- especially for our Seniors. However, we realize that it is more important to remain home and do our part to help prevent the spread of COVID-19. We are all working and living differently now and I want to acknowledge how large that adjustment is for all of us.

As you remember, we were one of the first districts in the Commonwealth to begin our remote learning program. Instead of waiting for initial DESE guidance, we just started. In late March we focused primarily on presenting content, assigning work, and giving student feedback asynchronously. During the month of April, despite DESE guidance to continue with an asynchronous platform, we gradually introduced synchronous instruction using video conferencing tools to help teachers foster direct connections with students. We have found through parent and student feedback that the remote learning experience of our students varies widely. While some students find the work easy and accessible and are looking for more challenges, other students and families report having a very difficult time. Some students look forward to connecting live with their teachers and classmates; others are much more ambivalent. Factors contributing to this broad range include age, learning style, home environment, technology and connectivity, and health. In short, we are committed to educating all of our students facing many different situations in many different learning environments.

In the past few weeks, our educators have learned a brand new way of teaching and are continuing to develop and improve their practice. Now, with the new knowledge that we have and with the most recent [April 30th DESE guidance](#), we are enhancing *School from Home* to better meet the educational needs of all students now that we know that we will not be returning to school for the remaining part of the school year. Elements of our improved *School from Home* program include:

- Continued emphasis on caring for ourselves, for others, and for our community
- A focus on teaching the content standards most critical for student success in the next grade
- Prioritization of meaningful connections between educators and students
- Multiple platforms for teachers to best meet students' learning needs
- Scheduling and coordination of synchronous classes
- Help for students and families to organize their time while learning remotely
- Videoconferencing safeguards
- Enhanced school support systems for students and families

The second part of this communication will go into further detail about each of the above areas of focus. Accompanying these descriptions are links to supporting documents that can further serve as a resource for you and your family. These documents are:

- [DESE's April 30th Guidance: Strengthening our Remote Learning Experience](#)
- [Prerequisite Content Standards: Elementary](#)
- [Prerequisite Content Standards: Secondary](#)
- [Middle School Schedule](#)
- [High School Schedule](#)
- [Weston School from Home Student Guidance](#)
- [Weston School from Home Parent/Guardian Guidance](#)
- [May 8th Letter from Weston's Office of Student Services](#)

We would like to close this letter by expressing gratitude and appreciation to all of our educators who are working diligently on behalf of students and families under unfamiliar, far-from-perfect circumstances. Our faculties' generation and sharing of new ideas and best practices has been astounding. We are rapidly getting better and better with remote instruction and we know that partnering with you continues to be critical. Please continue to let us know about your child's learning experience, and what you need to best support your students during this challenging time for all of us. Also, please continue to let us know about what is working well. It is Teacher Appreciation Week this week, certainly well-timed this year!

Wishing you good health,

Dr. Midge Connolly  
Superintendent of Schools

Dr. Kimo Carter  
Assistant Superintendent of Teaching & Learning

## **Updated School from Home Guidance**

*The following sections outline detailed guidance for families about the updated School from Home program. Full implementation of this new version of School from Home will start on Monday, May 11th.*

**Guiding principle of care.** Our guiding principle continues to be caring for ourselves, others, and the community. Care and education go hand-in-hand. When we teach, we care; when we care, we teach.

**A focus on teaching the content standards most critical for student success in the next grade.** During these last weeks of the school year, we will be moving forward with standards-based curriculum in every grade level and subject area. With their [April 30th guidance](#), DESE provided school districts with a pared-down list of those standards that are the most critical prerequisites for student success in the next grade. They are provided in these two documents: [Prerequisite Content Standards, Grades K-5](#) and [Prerequisite Content Standards, Grades 6-12](#). Fortunately, students have met or made good progress toward most of the standards earlier in the school year when students were in school. By the end of the school year, we expect that all students will meet or make significant progress toward meeting the great majority of prerequisite standards. However, there will be some content-specific standards that we will not be able to address by the end of the year. In these cases, we will adjust next year's curricular scope and sequence to ensure that these missing standards will be covered.

**Prioritization of meaningful connections between educators and students.** Maintaining regular connections with teachers characterized by two-way interaction is critical for students, especially for those who are in highly stressful situations. There are many ways for students to directly connect with their teachers, through synchronously taught classes, small group work, guided practice, individual check-ins, morning meetings, advisory groups, interest-based peer groups, office hours, and feedback on student work.

At the elementary level, classroom teachers will create a schedule that is a combination of whole class live meetings and small group live meetings. This schedule will allow students to make a direct connection with their classroom teacher every day. Classroom teachers will use their professional judgment in deciding on the combination of whole class and small group meetings. Specialist teachers, special educators, and interventionists will regularly have live meetings as well.

At the secondary level, teachers will provide a blend of synchronous and asynchronous instruction for students. Each middle/high school teacher will provide a minimum of one synchronous session per week, either with the whole class or in small groups. They also will continue to hold office hours, schedule appointments, and provide support for students who need help outside of class time. Thus, middle and high school students will have multiple opportunities to connect with a teacher every day.

**Multiple platforms for teachers to best meet the learning needs of each student.** Our goal is to empower teachers to use their full repertoires of best practices to reach and teach students remotely. The challenge is that neither a synchronous nor an asynchronous remote environment adequately replaces being at school in a classroom. In order to teach all students as effectively as possible, teachers need to go back and forth between platforms. We are continually impressed with the many varied examples of teachers using their professional judgement to effectively find the balance between

synchronous and asynchronous remote instruction. Additionally, we have learned that students respond differently to synchronous and asynchronous instruction. Some learn better with the live connection; others are best served with recorded lessons. If you feel that the balance between the two platforms needs to be adjusted for your child, please contact your child's teacher.

***Coordination and communication of school schedules.*** Because teachers will be scheduling regular live instruction, schools have developed schedules so that classes/sessions do not conflict with one another. These schedules reflect our *School from Home* guidelines: 2 hours of a structured blend of synchronous and asynchronous learning time for grades K-2; 2.5 hours for grades 3-5; 3 hours for grades 6-8; 3.5 hours for grades 9-12.

Elementary schedules will vary by grade level and from day to day, depending on the content being taught by the classroom teacher and the rotation of Art, Music, Spanish, and Physical Education classes for the student. Generally, there is a window earlier in the day when classroom teachers will directly connect with students. Later in the day will be times when specialists can connect with students without conflicts. Interventionists will be meeting with individual students all throughout the day.

[The Middle School schedule](#) of live sessions is much more structured. 8:30 to 10:00 is a student support period. Then, 10:00-12:00 and 12:00-2:00 are two windows daily when students can have live sessions with their teacher. Finally, 2:00-3:30 is the window for performance groups and arts classes. Wednesdays are a change of pace with P.E., X-Block, and Advisory.

[The High School schedule](#) is moving to a 5-day rotation of blocks. Students will have four 50-minute class blocks from 11:00 to 3:10 on Mondays, Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Fridays. Time before 11:00 and after 3:10 will be for student support, where teachers can provide extra help by appointment, small group instruction, and office hours. Wednesdays have a lighter class load and more support time for students.

***Help for students and families to organize their time.*** Teachers will plan and organize assignments and class meetings ahead of time to allow students and families to plan time for schoolwork within their own daily routines and needs. This can be done through weekly teacher communications sent at the end of the previous week or over the weekend that outlines class meeting times and assignments. Teachers will clearly indicate which class meetings are required and which are optional. Teachers will also be continually working with students on time management, organization, and advocacy strategies.

We would like to share two guidance documents, one for students and one for parents and guardians, that will help families navigate and manage the increased *School from Home* expectations. Here are the links:

[Weston School from Home: General Guidance for Students](#)

[Weston School from Home: General Guidance for Parents and Guardians](#)

***Videoconferencing safeguards.*** As we continue the work to ensure the security of our video conference sessions, we are asking students and parents and guardians to follow two guidelines. First, it is important that students display their full, classroom-known name in the conferencing tool profile.

Younger students may need help with this if working on a parent's device. Second, we will be requiring students to turn on their cameras to verify identity when teachers take attendance. Additionally, we strongly encourage students to keep their cameras throughout the whole live session. Learning is social, and it is helpful for both teachers and students to see everyone fully engaged and participating. If it is very difficult for your child to be on camera, please contact your teacher or guidance counselor to discuss an alternative plan.

***School support systems for students and families.*** All schools have developed comprehensive systems to monitor and support students and families who are having difficulty engaging in *School from Home*. We have been reaching out and following up with many students and families. Sometimes, it will be just a regularly scheduled check-in; other times we will want to problem-solve with you. Please know that we understand how difficult life can be at this time and we will be as flexible and as accommodating as possible. However, please also understand that even though buildings are closed, school is in session, and that attendance and participation are required.

We will continue to support students on Individual Education Plans and 504 Plans. Here is a link to a [letter](#) from Jen Truslow, Director of Student Services, updating DESE guidance, including information on related services, IEP and 504 meetings, and extended school year. Please understand that there we are still awaiting DESE guidance in a number of Special Education areas and we appreciate your patience.

In closing, we would like to extend a warm, heart-felt Thank You to all parents and guardians for your support during this time of remote learning. Many aspects of *School from Home* are modeled after online education programs that teach remotely year round. We have found through the study of these programs that a critical component is that parents and guardians actively engage with, help, and supervise their children so that they can effectively learn online. This is a demanding job made much more difficult during this time of crisis. We greatly appreciate all that you are doing for your children and please connect with us if things become difficult. We will partner with you and provide the accommodations and support that you need.