April 3, 2020

Dear Elmira Heights Central School District Community:

It's hard to imagine that it was only a few weeks ago we are attending school during the day, looking forward to fun school activities in the evenings, and hoping for a break in the weather so we could be outside enjoying the start of spring sports. Life has changed and so, school has changed. This update is meant to bring people up to speed on where we are in our Phase II activities.

Phase II is designed to sustain educational continuity during this extended school closure. The first wave of Phase II work is rolling out now. Officially, we are closed by Governor Cuomo's decree through April 15th. Most would assume this will be extended for another two weeks. We have taken the position of working to stay ahead of those closures to provide the educational continuity; Phase II. We will adjust to Phase III, our end of year plan for the 19-20 school year, when we can come back to school.

In Phase II we are focused on improving the work we have students participate in at home. We know this work is supported by families, for the most part, up until this point. This was Phase I of this COVID-19 Closure. Now in Phase II, we are figuring out ways we can enhance this experience for our kids.

At the middle school and high school levels we are pushing towards a more digitally-based learning platform. This is a shift, as we do not have a 1:1 computer initiative like many of our neighboring schools. Being that this is so new, we need to have the most accurate information on what students have available currently in their homes.

We will be sending a survey out to see what our capacities are for families to take on this digital enhancement. We will be asking about Internet connectivity, as well as the type of technology available in the home. Please look for this survey in the coming days, which will be available via email. For those who we don't hear from, or are unable to be reached through email, we will follow up with calls from school.

While not everybody will be able to participate digitally, we feel we can support those who are unable to do so in a reasonable manner, but see this enhancement has a strong enough benefit to push forward with the initiative.

At our elementary level we will continue to utilize our packet production as the core on which we build our academic supports. As teachers can, we will continue to communicate with our students and support them through this time. We are exploring more and diverse ways of making these connections and supporting our students and families during this closure.

We are currently working to complete a plan of the next wave of Phase II learning here in the Heights. In the coming weeks each building will send to families their plan for educational continuity during the ongoing school closure. This will include guidelines for the work being done at home, the plan for staying connected with teachers, and other supports to supplement time at school for our kids.
Other topics of note:

3-8 Grade State Assessments: Cancelled

Regents Exams: Currently being reviewed at the State level. There is no word yet if these will be cancelled, and what this would mean for progress towards graduation. Please be reassured, everything we are hearing from these discussions is meant to minimize any negative impact on our students, in particular our seniors.

Spring Break: You may have heard that spring break has been cancelled. What this means is that we will continue to support the learning experiences our kids are involved in during the week we would have otherwise been on spring break. Work is going home, and teachers are available to assist.

Spring Sports: As of communications during the last couple of days our league, the I.A.C., has a plan for a delayed start for our sports seasons. This could involve an abbreviated league schedule, but final details would be put in place when a back to school date is established. We're all certainly hoping our Spartans get to take up the colors this spring!

Other Events: Prom, Senior Trip, Graduation, etc... As of right now we are adjusting impacted events according to the window of time our governor has us on closure. Much like sports, when we return will determine the impact on these activities. We will do everything in our power to maintain these big events in our students lives, even if it means the timing is adjusted. Though these are huge events in our students lives I know everyone wants answers on, we just don't have any answers at this point. We are brainstorming potential scenarios but really, until we have a formal cancellation of school during the window of time these events take place, we go forward with our timing and plan as is.

Additionally, we continue with our lunch and breakfast programs. Please check out our website at heightsschools.com for more information in this program. You can also access a lot of information through our various social media accounts. Links are available on the school website.

We understand this is a difficult time for everyone. Families are taking on roles supporting our students learning at a high level, and it can be downright tough to do. Many of our staff are also parents and so, we have insight into what this looks and feels like in our own homes. We are taking care to balance the challenging nature of the work and the ability to support it. We may be on a school closure, but our teachers can still be contacted for help. Look for that information with communications from our specific levels. We are here for our students. We are in this together! And hopefully, we will be back at school together soon.

#FortheHeights

Michael F. Gill
Superintendent of Schools