COVID-19 Educational Update 4/2/20

Dear BCSS and BCTS Administration, Staff, Parents/Guardians,

I am just touching base to give you another update about “where we are” and “where we are going” during this challenging and unprecedented time. I remain incredibly proud and appreciative of how our families, our schools and our districts are operating “remotely”.

1. Our administrators, teachers and specialists report that student attendance and engagement in their remote learning remain excellent. We continue to see initiative, creativity and flexibility from our teachers; and we see a high level of support for our efforts from parents and guardians at home. Individual situations of difficulty we have encountered so far have been addressed quickly and effectively. As this "remote operation" model continues for a longer period of time, we will build on the instructional content our educators initially prepared; but if what we have seen from them (as well as our administrators and support staff) so far is an indication, we will master this challenge for as long as we are asked.

2. Spring Recess will be next week, from April 6th until April 10th. Remote instruction will not take place during this week. We have all been under an enormous amount of stress from the disruptions to our lives and the specter of illness that hangs over all of us. I would like everyone...students, parents/guardians and staff alike, to take the opportunity next week to “unplug”. This should be a time to take a breath, try to think about what remains good and functional in our lives amidst all of this chaos, and gear ourselves up to come back “online” with renewed energy and hope for what’s to come the week after next. Above all else, please be safe and keep yourselves healthy.

3. We have no information about when schools will reopen for students, so remote instruction will resume after spring recess on April 13th. Governor Murphy and his administration will not assess the reopening of schools until at least April 17, 2020, at the earliest. The federal government has recommended nationwide social distancing, and will not reassess its recommendation until April 30th, at the earliest. Last week the NJ Commissioner of Education specifically asked that school administrators refrain from announcing or speculating about school reopening dates unless they are directed to do so by the Governor. The Governor
has emphasized that the decision to reopen schools will be based on information and advice from public health and safety experts, and in consultation with educators and school districts. As I said, our collective experience since mid-March has shown that we can, and we will, continue to master this challenge for as long as we need to.

4. For your information, the NJ State Board of Education met via Skype yesterday (4/1/2020) to work on a small agenda of near-term priorities. One of the actions it took was to approve an emergency temporary modification to the state Special Education regulations to permit school districts and approved agencies to deliver related services to students with disabilities through tele-practice, (i.e. electronic communication via virtual, remote or online platforms.) This authority is effective immediately and will remain in place until the Governor rescinds his Executive Order requiring the closure of all schools due to COVID-19. Our staff will begin providing these tele-practice services to eligible students sometime during the week remote school operations resumes after the spring recess.

As I have said to you all before, this has been a challenging and stressful time. I want to thank every one of you for how much you have each “leaned in” since this started...to be safe, to stay engaged with our students’ remote learning and to support each other. Enjoy your time next week!

Sincerely,

Howard Lerner, Ed.D.
Superintendent