

Message from Ray Miley, Board Member: 4-27-20

April 27, 2020

Dear Families of the Island Park School District, My sincere hope is that this letter finds everyone well and coping with this unprecedented situation peacefully. I want to first say my heart goes out to anyone who has lost a loved one or has any family or friend sick at this time. My thoughts and prayers are with each and every one of you!

As we are approaching the seventh week of distance learning, I know we have faced or are facing different obstacles in the way of having an optimal learning environment for our children. Please know that the school district is working hard to meet the unique needs of each and every individual child in the district. We know that all children learn differently during normal circumstances, so we need to work harder than ever now in order to differentiate instruction so that every child feels successful.

Being a teacher myself in the New York City School District with children with special needs, I see firsthand the struggles families are having with this remote learning. I've spent countless hours on the phone and online with parents from helping with setting up their devices to other issues like how to respond to a lesson remotely or even how to help calm down an anxious child. This is a unique situation for everyone and one thing I have learned is that we cannot take for granted that anyone should know what to do without guidance. Please do not hesitate to reach out to your child's teacher or other staff at school if you have any question or problem at all! That is what they are there for. You are not expected to be an expert at distance learning. All we ask is that you be there for your children and help them feel safe at this unpredictable time.

I know that each home has its own set of unique circumstances. Some parents are at home and have some time to spend with their children on school work while others are out on the front lines working harder than ever and risking their lives every day. Others are home but working remotely even harder than they did when they were physically at their job site. We know that and we appreciate all the efforts you are making to keep your children engaged in "school". Please just continue to do your best to help your children succeed while making sure you are providing them with physical and mental breaks during the school day.

Something I have noticed brings me twangs of excitement and optimism. I have observed that the students and parents I have worked with have grown significantly since the beginning of this phase of distance learning. I have heard statements change from, "I can't do this!" to "Wow, this is cool!" Students and parents are learning and achieving things technologically that they never dreamed they could be doing. I think all teachers, children and parents will be so much better with technology after this ordeal is over with. We are becoming more proficient not only with technology but also hygienically and with our critical thinking skills. Children will now really know the importance of cleanliness and will know how diseases spread, and realize the importance of washing their hands thoroughly and consistently. They will know why they are washing their hands and not just doing it because they are told to. The critical thinking skills being learned and reinforced at this time are invaluable and are helping to make everyone better

citizens. We are all learning that having love and compassion and helping each other is the most important thing any child or adult can learn.

So as we approach this next phase of learning in a remote manner, please know that the school district is there for you. We are adjusting instruction to meet the needs of all students and help each student thrive not only academically, but more importantly emotionally and socially. I've been thinking about this term, "social distancing" we've been using. I think it should be changed to "physical distancing". Although we cannot be together physically during this time, we need to be socially connected more than ever, especially the children. We need social closeness at this time from connecting on FaceTime, Skype, or Zoom, to waving to grandparents through nursing home windows. This is a time to really live the Island Park School District's motto, "Together We Are Better!"

Sincerely,

Ray Miley
Island Park School Board Trustee