

Superintendent Report for April 2020 Dr. Pam Vogel

History tells us that we cannot always predict what happens in the world. Where we are today looks far different than two months ago. At the same time that we try every day to reconcile ourselves with what we are facing, I can say that our staff members have been doing an amazing job of doing all they can to support our students and families. Everyone has stepped up, shown a willingness to try new things, reaching out to families and students in new ways, and going the extra mile.

When we return from our spring break, we will have had 5 weeks of Distance Learning. Everyone has become more comfortable with the online platforms and the amount of academic work that is doable for our students. Initially, we felt that teachers were attempting to teach the amount of content that they were accustomed to in a normal school day. But everyone learned very quickly to pull back somewhat and allow our students and their parents the opportunity to adjust to new modes of instruction. I am so proud of our teachers, paraeducators, and Pupil Services staff, for their willingness to try different ways to teach virtually. We have changed the teaching schedule to accommodate everyone. Mondays through Thursdays are days of instruction. Fridays are used for “specials” teachers to have some additional time with students and for all teachers to have a day of planning. It is also a day for students to catch up on work they are missing.

Our Food Service has been a tremendous way to stay connected to families and to provide another resource that families need most. The numbers requesting meals are increasing every day, as more learn that this program is for any family with children who reside in our school districts. We have adjusted the staff numbers helping to prepare the food, as well as those who have helped with deliveries, so that we are utilizing our staff members to the fullest. Everyone assisting have given their all and I know that those who are receiving the food greatly appreciate what these staff members and our schools are doing. We also owe a thanks to the community agencies in Cornwall for their provision of food for many families in Cornwall and to the White Hart Restaurant in Salisbury who contacted me on Day 1 to ask how they could help. The White Hart wanted to keep their staff employed and are generously giving their meal preparations to the families from Lee H. Kellogg School. Over the spring break, social service agencies in Kent, Cornwall, and Salisbury helped provide certificates to families and Berkshire Taconic supplied grocery certificates to families in Falls Village, North Canaan, and Sharon. We are grateful to all of these people who made this possible

Custodians continue to work in their buildings, cleaning and doing other maintenance jobs that their daily schedules don't usually permit time for. Most schools are adjusting custodial schedules so there are fewer individuals in the building at one time. Each person knows that they are to keep social distance as they do their in their jobs and to ensure that all the areas are to be disinfected, particularly the areas used more frequently, such as office areas and occasionally classrooms, as teachers find the need to gather more materials, although most know now that we expect entrance into the buildings should occur rarely.

For everyone who must be in the schools, we expect that these staff members wear masks and practice the hygienic practices, which includes social distancing and gloves when needed. We are not allowing any other staff members in the schools.

We were not certain that we had full time work for our support staff, but knew that our employees needed their full pay. When schools closed, some were not keeping staff working, but were paying full salaries. I felt there were ways we could ascertain work for all of our staff, not just custodians, secretaries, and food service staff, but also paraeducators to support teachers. This has been an adjustment for many paraeducators who were accustomed to working with students face to face; however, we are hearing from teachers and principals that they are communicating with their paras and that everyone- teachers and families alike, are appreciative of the assistance paras provide their students. I believe that the decision we made for our schools to continue to pay support staff in full, and to reduce their work day by half, has been of benefit to us all.

I have been sending new information to administrators and to Board members, as soon as I receive it. The statewide conference calls to superintendents from the Department of Education Commissioner and the consistent communications from CAPSS and Shipman & Goodwin have enabled us to stay informed.

Our administrative meetings occur twice a week online. We are now adding a virtual Special Education meeting with Carl and Martha for each of the schools, to include the special education teachers, principal in that school, and the Pupil Services staff who serve those children, such as the Occupational Therapist, the Physical Therapist, the Speech and Language Pathologist, and the Behavior Specialist. This is to check in on each student who has special needs to see that we are addressing each child's goals in their Individual Special Education Plan.

You probably know that the Governor has stated that schools will be closed until at least May 20. We will wait to see if this extends beyond this date, but in the meantime, we can feel very proud that our staff continues to stay focused on engaging and instructing students. We expect that there will be some students who will benefit from supplementary instruction between now and the next school year, but we will address this a month from now when we know more about what is to come for the remainder of the 2019-2020 school year.

I thank the administrators and all of our staff for making the best of a challenging time and situation. And thank you to our Board members, also. We share the same goals—to see that our students are engaged, loving, or at least appreciating. Learning - and that our staff all understand that each person we employ has a vital role in making our schools vital to our communities.