

Frequently Asked Questions

Continuous Learning During School Closure

April 21, 2020

These questions and answers were generated based on inquiries gathered through April 15 in collaboration with the PTA units at each school and the Mercer Island PTA Council. As a learning organization, Mercer Island District continues to use feedback provided at the classroom, school and district level to adjust and improve. **Answers to these questions are dynamic and will evolve as our staff and system finds new and different ways to better meet the needs of our students.** We ask our community to continue to offer feedback that allows us to build on successes and address shortcomings. We want to thank our PTA council and site leaders for their continued support of our students and collaborative efforts with our schools.

Thanks,

MISD Leadership Team

Student/Teacher Meetings and Interactions

Q: Across the district, what is the expectation for how often teachers are conducting zoom meetings? Recording lesson videos? Commenting on submitted work? Grading submitted work?

A: Elementary staff are encouraged to reach out to students and parents via Zoom, SeeSaw, and other platforms to offer social-emotional learning support, instruction that supports the learning grid, and instructional support for parents.

Cross-building grade level lesson design teams will be deciding which work should be submitted to elementary teachers for feedback/assessments. Look for these to be highlighted on future learning grids.

IMS students have access to office hours for direct communication with teachers at a minimum of two times per week. Some of these opportunities include Zoom meetings for both content Q and A as well as social-emotional connections with students. Teachers teams have been, and will continue, determining the three to five tasks per week to be assigned and giving feedback as appropriate to where students are in the progression of learning.

At the high school, each class has a designated meeting block of time each week.

Teachers have open hours from 2 pm-3 pm, on Mondays, Tuesdays and Thursdays. These blocks of times are not intended to be bell to bell scheduled classes. This time includes small group instruction time, 1:1 support and virtual class time. Islander Hour occurs on Wednesdays.

Q. Why aren't teachers offering live or recorded daily classes to their own students (even if it's just for one hour per day)?

A. Teachers are directed to reach out to students and families throughout the week and offer instruction that supports the grade level learning grid, social-emotional learning, and parent support.

No teacher is prevented from providing live and/or recorded daily instruction. If parents feel live or recorded daily instruction would improve their children's experiences, they should connect with the teacher and request it. Some teachers are also parents and supporting their own children's at-home learning and personal needs.

Q. When will we receive online teaching like other districts are doing using Google Classrooms and MS Teams?

A. We are currently providing online learning at both the high school and elementary levels. The middle school is prepared to begin offering it April 20. Our platform for engaging in live lessons with students/families is ZoomPro. Many teachers have been doing this already.

Q. Is there going to be some level of standardized teacher/student interaction across the same grade level for each school?

A. Individual teachers have autonomy to decide on the schedule and amount for student/teacher interactions. The [Memorandum of Understanding](#) between the District and the Mercer Island Education Association does have an expectation that all teachers should be interacting with students regularly. Grade level teams are meeting in professional learning communities where they are planning and calibrating ways to support the learning grids. Included in their discussions and calibrations will be ways to support all learners through video conferences/instruction, assignment feedback, and social/emotional outreach. If you have additional questions, please contact your child's teacher.

Q. Could teachers do a daily morning 15-minute zoom call? This seems like a very doable practice in ensuring students are showing up, setting a structure for the day, engaging with teachers. Additionally, teachers will be made aware what

students aren't participating which provides a way to identify vulnerable students.

A. For some students, this would definitely work. Again, teachers are meeting in grade-level/content-alike teams to design the work and share expectations. We can share this feedback with them.

However, this model will not work for all students. We know of a number of students who are currently in childcare facilities and are unable to participate in real time, or who are providing care or support at home and are unable to engage at a specific time. We have staggered office hours so there are morning and afternoon sessions for each class throughout the week to better meet the needs of students and families.

Q. What are office hours? Are they for students or parents? When will they start?

A. Office hours are dedicated times when families can expect teachers to be available. Office hours can be for either parents or students to access teachers. This might depend upon the student's age and/or developmental process. Office hours have started this week. If teachers have not posted or communicated these to you, please reach out to the teacher. If you do not hear a response please reach out to the principal.

Student Feedback, Grades and Assessments

Q. Why are some teachers telling students some activities are 'optional'?

A. Prior to April 3 and the beginning of spring break, teachers were collecting previous assignments that had not been turned in before schools closed. The emphasis was on "previous" learning that took place when schools were open. Beginning on April 13, assignments included "new" learning. Assignments will need to be completed by students to allow teacher feedback and assessment. For high school courses, these assignments will be used for grading and granting course credit. Just like the typical school setting, not all assignments will be mandatory. Some are assigned as extra practice and may still be optional as designated by the teacher.

Q. When will the teachers be asked to review the students work - and give some feedback or acknowledgment?

A. Grading in this new learning environment is going to look different. Teachers will identify the assignments or evidence of learning that they want students to submit for feedback.

Elementary teachers are developing the learning grids. Grade level lesson teams will be deciding which work should be submitted to teachers for feedback/assessments. Look for these to be highlighted on future grids.

Middle school started the third trimester on April 20. While some work to end the second trimester (April 13 to April 17) may be collected, students will be turning in and receiving feedback in a more structured manner beginning in trimester three.

High school: Beginning April 13, classes resumed with new learning and course content. Students, based on course content and the nature of the learning, will turn in assignments in a variety of formats for feedback so they can earn the credit needed for graduation.

Q. Will there be an assessment of kids that might need to remain in the same grade next year, or a plan in place to help families that would like their child to repeat their current grade?

A. We do not have a mastery assessment for students to pass each grade level. For example, not all students pass the Smarter Balanced Assessment each year. We work with students and meet them where they are in their learning progression. We will not be leaving children behind.

At every grade level, teachers will be adjusting their expectations and planning for the beginning of the 2020-21 school year, knowing there will be implications from the current non-traditional teaching and learning experience.

Best Practices and Remote Learning Tools

Q. I have experienced some great wins from the district during the school closures. How are these wins being shared and built upon throughout the district so that all students and families experience these wins?

A. We are collecting these celebrations across our leadership team and are sharing with staff at the weekly site staff meetings. This sharing is part of the PLC work teachers and principals are doing on an ongoing basis.

Q. Is MISD evaluating what other districts are using as far as remote learning platforms (such as Microsoft Teams and Google Classroom). Why are we still using Schoology? Why are we re-inventing the wheel with technology with sending teachers to find content and create workflow grids?

A. We have studied a variety of platforms and decided that for meetings with students, our platform is ZoomPro. Teachers at MIHS may choose to use the Schoology Conference feature or ZoomPro, and the teachers are communicating with students how they will be engaging. Zoom's breakout rooms are a useful feature and have been well utilized by staff.

There were limitations with Google Meet that we felt would not adequately address some of our educational needs and concerns. Moving to MS Teams (a completely new platform) during a time of so much other change seemed untenable for students and staff.

Google Classroom is not built for multiple classrooms so is not an ideal solution for middle school or high school students with multiple teachers and classes. Schoology, however, offers students and staff a better way to see multiple courses and assignments (including due dates, etc.).

Schoology also has more tools to help support teachers and students, such as the ability to integrate external tools like Wayside, playposit, and others.

Therefore, the district has decided to create their own Learning Grid (utilizing Schoology and Seesaw as communication platforms) to pull together Mondo Reading, TCI Science, Houghton-Mifflin Math Expressions, Being a Writer Writing, etc. The district is committed to utilizing a curriculum that both teachers and students are familiar with.

Parents as Teachers

Q. Given the limited interaction between student and teacher, it is up to the parents to oversee the schedule, provide feedback on the work, and “grade” the work. What tools can you give us to do this more effectively?

A. In an effort to help support parents, the elementary teams have adjusted their deadlines to provide the grids to families on Friday evenings so families can review the weekly tasks over the weekend to determine a schedule and structure that will be feasible the following week.

Just as teachers create lesson plans and schedules daily for students in their classrooms, it is recommended that parents assess the expectations for each of their students and devise a daily schedule that will accommodate all of the needs within the household.

Q. We have high expectations of ourselves and want to be great teachers for our children. However, we feel like we are not doing a good job. What support can we get from teachers?

A. Developing skills and expertise to become a master teacher takes an entire career. Our teachers also want to be perfect and are often their own worst critic. We would like

to acknowledge that any time and effort you put into your child's education will be beneficial. Right now is not the time for perfectionism. Instead, jump in, try some things that feel right for you and your child, and learn forward. When you brought your child home from the hospital they did not give you a fool-proof handbook that guaranteed parental success. The same is true now.

With that said, please reach out to your child's teacher(s) if you have questions. Our teachers are excellent consultants as well as teachers!

Q. Parents need to supervise the kids most of the time, so I don't know what parents who are working full time would do. How are we creating a plan considering two working parents? Are these plans being tested so that kids (K-12) can function independently?

A. Just as students may not function independently in school classrooms, we cannot expect them to function independently at home. We realize this is a major challenge; many of us are experiencing the same challenges with our own children. There is no playbook for this type of simultaneous learning and working environment. Do the best you can right now to meet the needs of your child socially, emotionally, physically, and academically. Your child will be neither ahead nor behind when the more traditional school resumes. Our teachers will pick them up right where they are in the learning progression and move them forward.

Q. Would you please make it very clear that parent feedback is welcome and how we are to give it/to whom?

A. Yes! We have collated feedback from the emails we've received thus far and continue to refine and revise our processes as a result.

Additionally, we have created feedback tools (ex: [Elementary Parent Feedback Survey](#)) to gather information about what is and is not working and our school and district teams review the feedback and insights daily.

We look forward to hearing about what is working and what isn't working as we continue down this unprecedented path of online learning for our students.

At the high school we are collecting feedback from students through Islander Hour about their learning needs during this time. For virtual graduation planning we are surveying all seniors and their parents as well as staff.

Q. What is going to happen when business starts to open again and parents have to go to work? Who is then going to take care of the kids and oversee the learning?

A. This is a new experience for all of us and we all are facing challenges as to who will look after our children while we work. This is something we will take one step at a time. There are no simple, easy solutions - we are all in this together.

Technology, Tools and Materials

Q. Students are on the computer for a significant amount of time doing assignments. Can we get their workbooks and classroom instructional materials?

A. We are working to devise a plan for students to be able to access their belongings and resources that are currently at the schools. There is a committee working to address this request, but the current limitations of the stay home, stay healthy order, in addition to required social distancing requires us to carefully devise a work plan for this to take place. There will be information coming soon to parents on when and how they can pick up materials and belongings from schools.

Q. How can my family access a device or wifi hotspot for learning at home during the closure? Who do we contact for technology support?

A. During the school closures, we have created a process for families to request that the District provide a student iPad and/or a mobile hotspot for internet access. This will be extended to our elementary families as well as our middle and high school families. If your student does not have access to wireless internet or a device to access online resources, please complete our technology request form [HERE](#).

If families require support gaining access to any of these online resources, we have a team available to help answer questions through the following email addresses:

- elem.techs@mercerislandschools.org
- ims.techs@mercerislandschools.org
- hs.techs@mercerislandschools.org

Q. Can we check out books from the elementary libraries?

A. Not at this time, but we will continue to explore options, especially as the stay home stay safe plans are loosened by our state.

Communication

Q. What is the district plan for communication consistency, especially across grade levels (elementary, middle, high school) regarding student expectations?

A. We are setting forth clear expectations of which assigned work is mandatory at each grade level. These parameters will come from the teachers.

Staff

Q. What does a typical day look like for an elementary, middle school and high school teacher right now? How are teachers accounting for their time?

Teachers are working in grade-level/content-area PLCs to design the content and activities. During these meetings they share practices, challenges, etc. to support each other in working to meet student needs. They are conducting student/family outreach/engagement via Zoom, SeeSaw and other platforms. They are also participating in staff meetings, IEP, 504 meetings, professional development, principal's cabinet meetings and doing assessment/feedback.

Planning Ahead: Summer and Next School Year

Q. What summer-school options are being contemplated, and when will the district determine what these options will be?

A. Summer school will likely not be an in-school model like we have offered in the past. Instead, we are planning for both remote learning and/or a hybrid learning environment where small groups may be able to convene. We will follow the guidelines set forth for gatherings from state and local officials.

K-8 Summer School will not be offered as a comprehensive replacement of the third trimester for all students. We will target specific students who were already behind or deficient in skills prior to the COVID-19 closure. These students are the same ones we have always worked to support in previous years.

9-12 Summer School will be focused on students deficient in credits or those needing credit retrieval. The options for health and P.E. will be limited by the availability of staff, just like they have been in previous years.

Q. Will the schools be following the normal process of student/teacher placement for next year - and will families have the opportunity to submit exception requests? Please answer as much as you know at this time even if it's that more information.

A. Yes, the district will be having its usual student placement process at the elementary level, with families having the opportunity to give input for special considerations for placement in May. The intra-district transfer requests are being accepted through April 30, the form is [HERE](#).

Q. Is it possible that the 2019-2020 school year would be extended, or 2020-2021 will start early to help catch students up?

A. We will be observing our contracted calendar with June 19 being the last day of school (2019-2020) and Sept. 2 as the first day of school (2020-2021) for students.

Kindergarten

Q. If schools are still online in the fall, how will kindergarten be handled? Is delaying entry a possibility for families? What are the legal requirements for when a child must start school?

A. Kindergarten would begin as usual for those enrolled whether in a building or online, and we encourage families to complete their registration for 2020-21 if they have yet to do so. For more information, visit mercerislandschools.org/kindergarten. Although state law does not require students to attend kindergarten, they are strongly encouraged to do so.

Differentiated Learning

Q. Will small group learning be offered to students who have previously benefited from this – how could this look for all levels and are teachers given the option to do this, and if so, why not?

A. Differentiated instruction for small groups in this new setting is being developed collaboratively by classroom teachers, coaches, LSP teachers and others.

Our elementary Learning Support Program (LSP) teachers will communicate with their families this week (April 20 - 24) regarding this plan. Moving forward into the rest of the school year, families can expect some time options to connect with LSP support. The first interaction will be to set the stage, norms, general guidelines, and frankly, to check in with the students who haven't seen their LSP teacher (often a great connection for them) in quite a while. Some of these sessions will be live, working with the teacher, and others will be recorded. We are working on assessing options for additional resources to support ongoing learning while students are at home.

Q. When and how will special education and related service support be rolled out to students?

A. Teachers and Service Providers have reached out to students and families to create a Continuity of Learning Plan to help students access instruction and to move learning forward. IEP and Evaluation meetings are moving forward to the extent possible as some testing cannot be completed due to the Governor's Proclamation.

Q. Will special needs students be given an option of onsite schooling to meet their unique learning needs?

A. The Governor's 20-08 and 20-09 Proclamations have closed schools and in-person services for all students.