April 24, 2020

Dear PPSD Community,

Governor Raimondo and Commissioner Infante-Green today announced yesterday that distance learning in Rhode Island will continue through the end of this school year.

While this decision does not come as a shock to all who have been following the progression of the COVID-19 virus, it is nevertheless a difficult reality to face. We know that the interactions, celebrations and relationships that take place within our school walls cannot be truly replicated from a safe distance. We are all, in our own ways, grieving the loss of these experiences.

What gives me hope, however, are our powerful efforts to make distance learning viable for our students. As you all know firsthand, when our nation was confronted with the coronavirus threat, Rhode Island had to adapt quickly to create and implement a plan so that education could continue outside a traditional classroom setting. Our solution was not perfect but it was actionable, and I am so proud of how our governor; our commissioner; our school leaders, teachers and staff; and our wonderfully committed families rose to this challenge with one goal in mind: to support our student learning during this crisis.

This experience has taught me that our community can pivot and innovate with remarkable speed. I commend all of you for your efforts to date, and I thank you for your patience as we have continued to improve our delivery systems on the fly. My greatest fear in extended distance learning through the end of June is not that we would be unable to do it; I know we can. My fear is that some families—families who have been stressed and stretched already by the physical, emotional and financial consequences of COVID-19—may despair at the continuation of distance learning and, as a result, lessen their commitment to participating. This is what keeps me up at night—my concern for the stress our families are experiencing and my concern for the potential learning loss our students may suffer.

My ask of you today is simple: please stay committed. Work with us, and we will work with you. If you need help with technology, reach out so we can help walk you through the technical issues you are having. If you don’t understand how to help your child with schoolwork or how to monitor your child’s progress, call us and we can offer insight and resources. If you need more flexibility with scheduling, talk to your child’s principal or teacher to see how we can accommodate your scheduling issues. If you need help motivating your child to get work done, let us know, and our staff can work up a support plan.

While most of us have never experienced a pandemic, every year many of our students do experience summer learning loss. Each September, our teachers must re-cover old ground to replace the learning that has slipped away over July and August. I do not want to imagine a September where we must recover from six months of learning loss instead of two. We owe it to our students to do better.

Thank you for working with us to continue meaningful educational experiences for all our students.

Sincerely,

Harrison Peters
Superintendent

p.s. If you have ideas about how we can improve or build upon our distance learning efforts, please email me at innovate@ppsd.org. I want to hear from you.