



OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDENT

Monday, April 13, 2020

Dear YCSD Families and Staff,

As I started the day this morning, I paused to think about what our schools might have looked like today when our teachers, principals and school staff would have been welcoming students back into our schools from spring break. There is always excitement, enthusiasm and renewed energy when our school communities come back together after these breaks. While we cannot have that experience in person, the York County School Division will continue to work together to support our students in these remaining weeks of the school year.

The division has developed a [Continuity of Learning website](#) to provide families a more central location to access information and resources while schools and offices remain closed to the public. While I will address much of the information provided on that site in this letter, I encourage you to visit the site weekly to access up-to-date information and answers to your questions.

Background

The division's long-term Strategic Plan includes core beliefs of the School Board. Among those beliefs are the statements:

- excellence is characterized by a caring, involved and dedicated school community...,
- data should be used to inform and adjust instruction and decision-making,
- student wellness supports student success, and
- students learn best in safe and secure environments.

As we evaluated [guidance](#) from the VDOE, we were very purposeful in considering how these unprecedented times are affecting our students, staff and families, their access to all the services that teachers and schools provide daily, and their ability to teach and learn in their home environments.

The goal of this plan is to implement instructional models that prepare all students for their next level of learning by focusing on the core competencies, skills and knowledge for each course and grade level. The division and our teachers have not changed their expectations for students to continue to learn and excel. Rather, we have **adjusted** our delivery of instruction and our grading practices to support student wellness, student engagement, and student success.

Continuity of Learning Plans

The York County School Division will continue to provide instruction through Continuity of Learning Plans (COLP) for students. These Extended Learning Plans, which were developed in accordance with guidance from the Virginia Department of Education, will include a variety of resources and instructional activities.

In developing these plans, we believe that COLPs need to be flexible enough to provide access and choice within structured and independent time for students, families, and staff. We are particularly mindful of health and wellness issues, and the added stress many families are experiencing through these difficult times. While some families will seek to engage their children in every educational activity provided, others may choose to participate

EMBRACE	•	ENGAGE	•	EMPOWER
Mark J. Shafer District 1		Laurel M. Garrelts District 3		Sean P. Myatt District 5
		Brett Higginbotham District 2		James E. Richardson District 4

only to the extent they are able. As you identify the strategy that works for your family, please remember all students should remain engaged with their learning and their teachers for the remainder of the year.

Elementary Plans

Recognizing that elementary learners rely on their teacher for daily instruction and are not developmentally ready for robust self-guided or distance learning models of instruction, the division has chosen to follow a VDOE model that implements review work for the remainder of this school year and incorporates new instruction into learning modules in the 2020-21 school year.

Our goal is to provide opportunities for students to continue to learn and develop while preventing the regression of skills and knowledge gained during the 2019-20 school year. Additionally, each grade level plan includes enrichment opportunities for students to extend their learning and thinking.

Next school year, teachers will conduct pre-assessments in units of study. Student performance on these assessments will be used to provide targeted remediation through the year. Pre-assessments will not be graded schoolwork.

Secondary Plans

As we shared on April 3, secondary students will complete a final week of review work in their courses this week, while teachers participate in professional development and planning for the remainder of the school year.

Beginning the week of April 20, teachers will begin providing instruction of identified essential content, not taught prior to March 12, through learning modules. Learning modules will be posted weekly, based on the course and remaining essential curriculum in that course. Teachers will make every effort to ensure all learning modules include engaging activities and feedback that supports student growth and that modules are paced so learning is balanced throughout the quarter.

The department of Student Services is working with teachers and coordinators this week regarding support for students with disabilities. Parents can expect direct communication from their teachers in the coming days.

Grading

The Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) has been very clear in its recommendation that student work **not be graded** while school buildings are closed and school divisions implement remote learning experiences. The VDOE also recognizes that grading policies are a local decision.

The York County School Division leadership has carefully and deliberately developed a grading plan for the 2019-20 school year that aligns with the VDOE recommendations. As such, students will not receive new grades for work completed between April 13 and the end of the school year.

Final grades for students in grade 6-12 will be calculated as follows:

Year-long courses:

Grades will be calculated using the student's quarters 1, 2 and 3 grades. Each quarter will count for approximately 33.3% of the final grade.

Semester-long courses:

The quarter 3 grade will become the semester grade.

** Students will be given additional opportunities to improve quarter 3 grades due to the change in weighting.*



4x4 Courses (York River Academy):

The final grade for second semester courses will be based on average quarters 1 and 2.

** YRA students will be given additional opportunities to improve quarters 1 & 2 grades due to the change in weighting.*

Rationale

Remote working and learning are different environments for our students and teachers and, as such, deserve a different mindset from our typical approach to teaching and learning. The work students complete, and the feedback teachers provide, during this time is not meant to replace the day-to-day instruction students would have received at school.

In discouraging school divisions from grading student work, VDOE also cites concerns regarding equity and access for all students. YCSD evaluated whether each and every student has the same level of access to distance learning, prior exposure to the tools and strategies being implemented, and the additional resources they need to be successful.

We also recognize that our families are facing many additional challenges associated with this global pandemic. While some families may be equipped to support the transition to learning at home, many are not. In these unusual circumstances, grading student work would not be a true reflection of the teaching and learning that occurs in the typical school day.

In Closing

I know some parents may not agree with the decisions we have made for our students and staff for the remainder of the school year. I can assure you that these decisions have been made after extensive review and evaluation and with the best interest of our students' and staff in mind.

The pace of our teaching and learning may have changed in the wake of the COVID 19 pandemic, but our passion for educating all students and our commitment to their academic, physical and emotional well-being remains steadfast.

Please continue to follow the practices outlined by the CDC and state of Virginia to help minimize the spread of the virus and keep your families safe. I encourage you to stay connected to the division through your child's teachers, the YCSD [Continuity of Learning website](#), and our social media platforms.

Thank you for your continued support of the York County School Division.

Sincerely,



Victor Shandor, Ed.D.
Division Superintendent
York County School Division