



April 2, 2020

Dear Parents and Friends of Japhet School,

It is my sincere desire to communicate all new information in regards to the closure of K-12 school buildings and Japhet School's approach to distance learning. Each step of the way, I have felt your support and patience. I appreciate your trust in our teachers and staff, and am humbled by your commitment to Japhet School's mission. This is a challenging time for all of us and we seek to stay unified and committed to our promise to you - to nurture your children and to integrate character education with a strong academic program. Through the end of this school year, it may be from a distance, but our commitment to you remains constant.

*My letter is lengthy, but all information is meant to inform and clarify any questions you may have as we move forward.*

Today Governor Whitmer announced, to quote the Executive Order, that "in-person instruction for pupils in kindergarten through grade 12 is suspended for the remainder of the 2019-2020 school year," and that "school buildings used for the provision of K-12 education must remain closed for the purpose of providing K-12 education in person for the remainder of the 2019-2020 school year, unless restrictions on public gatherings and use of school buildings are lifted," and that this order "applies to all public, nonpublic, and boarding schools in the state." She also ordered each district, to the best of its ability, provide distance learning to students.

### **Distance Learning Will Continue - Full Steam Ahead!**

Character in action! When the mandate was shared by Governor Whitmer to close on Monday, March 16, faculty and staff immediately responded in the following manner: we had a half-day of school, March 13, when we were able to send students home with the most crucial supplies: their textbooks, workbooks, and, for Middle Class and above, their Chromebooks. We also offered to provide any family who does not have a computer the loan of a school computer for their child at home. I must acknowledge, again, how important the grant from The Joseph and Mary Cacioppo Foundation has proven to be. Our Chromebooks were purchased through the grant money that has allowed students to be fully engaged in distance learning.

Education via distance learning is being provided to the BEST of our teachers' ability. My heart is full of gratitude for these amazing people who are your students' teachers. They continue to be inspired, to adapt, be courageous, and to learn and grow as well. However, I am not surprised at all at their commitment and response to adapt to a new form of instruction and learning. They are shining as

teachers and wonderful role models for our students. Classroom teachers have worked hard to set routines with students, supported by their parents at home -- and we know that Japhet parents are an important component in this endeavor. Parents, for all you are doing to balance your work duties, provide your child with a physical space to learn, being mindful of their emotional needs, and -- if needed because of your child's age -- supervise your child's e-classroom experience, I represent all teachers when I say *THANK YOU!* Your continued support is needed for distance learning to be a success. THANK YOU!

With core subject instruction now in a rhythm, our specialists have been joining the schedules with more frequency. Parents, you will continue to see an increase in specialists' lessons, with most communication from specialists coming through your child's classroom teacher. Participation in specialists' classes is optional but highly recommended, to give students an opportunity to keep learning and growing in all subject areas.

### **Spring Break Will Be a Break**

I have decided to honor our Spring Break to give our teachers and our students a much needed "relax and recharge" time. The break will pause Hangout meetings, required screen time, and required homework time. We encourage all our students to continue reading books for enjoyment, as always. We also recommend that students and parents continue to take advantage of and enjoy the enrichment resources that were vetted by our own teachers. These include field trips, arts and crafts, read-aloud stories, and more enrichment, and the link to them is on our website: <https://japhetschool.org/specialists-classes-enrichment-distance-learning/>.

Spring Break begins at 3:30 PM tomorrow, Friday, April 3, through Monday, April 13. **Distance Learning will resume on Tuesday, April 14, at a start time set by the classroom teacher.**

### **School Events**

Our first Bowl-a-bration scheduled for May 9 is postponed until summer or fall. If you have already committed funds as a sponsor or as a bowling team, we ask that you consider allowing us to forward this investment to the event when it does take place. If you prefer to have a refund, we will honor it. (If the event Bowl-a-bration is cancelled -- which we do not expect -- we certainly will refund all sponsorships and payments.) Unless we hear from you, we will keep your payments. If you prefer to have a refund, please contact me. **And please continue to promote the event! When it does take place, we want it to be a big success and CELEBRATION!**

Spring Sharing will not take place this year as a traditional musical and dramatic performance in front of a live audience, and there will not be a Gala. At this time, all ideas are being considered as to how students may perform a "sharing in spring" digitally of their creative endeavors.

Our three eighth grade students deserve to be celebrated and their individual efforts and accomplishments recognized! Japhet's Graduation ceremony, an inspiring tradition, may take on a new look, but there will be a celebration. We will celebrate this year's three graduates in some way, either live or digitally; stay tuned as plans progress.

Summer Camps are undecided at this time. Our own teachers teach summer camps. Right now, all of our effort is going toward providing quality distance learning. The ability to provide supervised summer camps also relies on our ability to open our building, as governed by the Executive Order. Please stay tuned for more information.

### **Staying Healthy: Physically and Emotionally**

In order to maintain the health of our communities, “stay home, stay safe,” is our national endeavor right now. This has had an emotional toll on all of us, and especially on children who might not understand what is happening. The emotional well being of our students is so very important to us. I stand by and share these strategies, which are provided by the National Association of School Psychologists, and I reprint them directly:

#### **STAY CALM, LISTEN, AND OFFER REASSURANCE.**

- Be a role model. Children will react to and follow your reactions. They learn from your example.
- Be aware of how you talk about COVID-19. Your discussion about COVID-19 can increase or decrease your child's fear. If true, remind your child that your family is healthy, and you are going to do everything within your power to keep loved ones safe and well. Carefully listen or have them draw or write out their thoughts and feelings and respond with truth and reassurance.
- Explain social distancing. Children probably don't fully understand why parents/guardians aren't allowing them to be with friends. Tell your child that your family is following the guidelines of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), which include social distancing. Social distancing means staying away from others until the risk of contracting COVID-19 is under control. Showing older children the "flatten the curve" charts will help them grasp the significance of social distancing. Explain that while we don't know how long it will take to "flatten the curve" to reduce the number of those infected, we do know that this is a critical time—we must follow the guidelines of health experts to do our part.
- Demonstrate deep breathing. Deep breathing is a valuable tool for calming the nervous system. Do breathing exercises with your children.
- Focus on the positive. Celebrate having more time to spend as a family. Make it as fun as possible. Do family projects. Organize belongings, create masterpieces. Sing, laugh, and go outside, if possible, to connect with nature and get needed exercise. Allow older children to connect with their friends virtually.
- Establish and maintain a daily routine. Keeping a regular schedule provides a sense of control, predictability, calm, and well-being. It also helps children and other family members respect others' need for quiet or uninterrupted time and when they can connect with friends virtually.
- Identify projects that might help others. This could include: writing letters to the neighbors or others who might be stuck at home alone or to healthcare workers; sending positive messages over social media; or reading a favorite children's book on a social media platform for younger children to hear.
- Offer lots of love and affection.

## MONITOR TELEVISION VIEWING AND SOCIAL MEDIA

- Parents/guardians should monitor television, internet, and social media viewing—both for themselves and their children. Watching continual updates on COVID-19 may increase fear and anxiety. Developmentally inappropriate information, or information designed for adults, can also cause anxiety or confusion, particularly in young children.
- Dispel rumors and inaccurate information. Explain to your child that many stories about COVID-19 on the internet may include rumors and inaccurate information. Older children, in particular, may be accessing a great deal of information online and from friends that contains inaccuracies. Talk to your child about factual disease information.
- Provide alternatives. Engage your child in games or other exciting activities instead.

## TAKE TIME TO TALK

- Let your children's questions guide you. Answer their questions truthfully, but don't offer unnecessary details or facts. Don't avoid giving them the information that experts indicate as crucial to your children's well-being. Often, children and youth do not talk about their concerns because they are confused or don't want to worry loved ones. Younger children absorb scary information in waves. They ask questions, listen, play, and then repeat the cycle. Children always feel empowered if they can control some aspects of their life. A sense of control reduces fear.

## BE HONEST AND ACCURATE

- Correct misinformation. Children often imagine situations worse than reality; therefore, offering developmentally appropriate facts can reduce fears.
- Explain simple safety steps. Tell your child this disease spreads between people who are in close contact with one another, when an infected person coughs or sneezes, or when one touches infected objects or surfaces.
- Stay up-to-date on the facts. Go to <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html> for additional factual information.

## KEEP EXPLANATIONS AGE-APPROPRIATE

- Early elementary school children. Provide brief, simple information that balances COVID-19 facts with appropriate reassurances that adults are there to help keep them healthy and to take care of them if they do get sick. Give simple examples of the steps people make every day to stop germs and stay healthy, such as washing hands. Use language such as "adults are working hard to keep you safe."
- Upper elementary and early middle school children. This age group often is more vocal in asking questions about whether they indeed are safe and what will happen if COVID-19 spreads in their area. They may need assistance separating reality from rumor and fantasy. Discuss the efforts national, state, and community leaders are doing to prevent germs from spreading.
- Upper middle and high school students. Issues can be discussed in more depth. Refer them to appropriate sources of COVID-19 facts. Provide honest, accurate, and factual information about the current status of COVID-19. Engage them in decision-making about family plans, scheduling, and helping with chores at home.
- For all children, encourage them to verbalize their thoughts and feelings. Be a good listener!

I realize this is a lot of information to absorb, but I truly hope that you find it helpful and reassuring. We are united in our efforts to bring the very best education to your children during this unprecedented time. Just as a flower is opening to the warm sunshine and it continues to bloom and grow - I promise you that, as partners in education, we will provide the very best education possible - and joy in seeing your children continue to grow. Thank you for your support, your partnership, and your commitment to Japhet School.

Most sincerely,

Kerri G. Vizona  
Head of School