

STONINGTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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May 8, 2020

Dear Parents and Families,

This week has been very busy and I have various updates to share with you. The governor announced Tuesday that schools in Connecticut will not reopen this academic year and distance learning will remain in place in Stonington until June 19th, our last scheduled day of school. Information will be forthcoming from the principals on arrangements to pick up your child's belongings at school. When these plans are released please be aware our staff is primarily concerned with the safety issues and social distancing measures will be adhered to at all times. Anticipate retrieving students' belongings outside of the school as you and your child will not be allowed into the school building at this time. The Connecticut State Department of Education is expected to release their expectations related to Extended School Year programming and summer school in mid-May. Once the staff has time to review those guidelines families will be notified about any distance or in person summer school offerings.

Principals will be reaching out to you today to update you on some shifts in instructional programming, grading and report card changes. Any questions or concerns should be directed to the building leaders.

We have received several questions about our budget process. The District worked with administrators, teachers, and other staff members to develop a budget proposal that kept most staffing and programming for next year. Every line item was diligently reviewed and justified. In order to meet this maintenance budget, an initial increase of approximately 2.5% was needed. When COVID hit the state/community, the Board of Finance requested that we reduce our proposed budget to a zero percent increase. Though very difficult, we agreed and followed their request and cut \$1.09M from our proposal resulting in a zero percent increase from this year. Then, without notice or further discussion with the District, we were surprised that the Board of Finance cut an additional \$500,000 dollars. The leadership team is examining how personnel and programming will be impacted and will be presenting options to the Board of Education to reduce the original proposal by a total of \$1.6M. There are many unknowns related to opening our schools which may have additional impacts on the budget.

On a positive note, during the first week of May each year we recognize our amazing employees who provide top educational opportunities to the children of Stonington. During Staff Appreciation Week we thank and salute all of our staff including our clerical, maintenance, food service, paras, administrators, nurses, teachers, related service providers, tech and others who continue to keep our students healthy and educationally involved during this pandemic.

In addition, I have been advised by the **Educator of the Year Committee** that the nomination process this year has taken an unusual twist which completely and appropriately aligns with our recent abrupt and unexpected pathway into the world of distance teaching and learning. The Committee has received two unprecedented nominations that reflect the wish to honor not only one outstanding educator, but all outstanding educators. These nominations speak to all Stonington Public Schools educators exhibiting incredible collaboration, affection for students, and commitment to the district vision in grades preK-12 over the past 8 weeks. I am very proud to announce the unanimous decision of the **Educator of the Year Committee** to bestow the honor of **Educator of the Year 2021** to all the educators in Stonington Public Schools. Congratulations to all of our educators for collectively and individually showing students, families and staff the very best in the profession! Join me in thanking and congratulating our outstanding educational team.

Dr. Van Riley
Superintendent