

Dear students and families:

March 16, 2020

We have a lot we would like to communicate with you about, so we are sending two separate emails this morning to chunk up some important information. We will also be sending additional emails later this week to add details/answer questions about some of these topics.

- Email #1 (this one) contains information about our approach to what we are calling “Home Learning,” as well as information about resources you can access if you need assistance with Home Learning.
- Email #2 (which will come right after this one) contains specific links to this week’s Home Learning assignments for students.

Home Learning

As a school, it is our intention to try to move forward with our planned learning for students, as best as we are able. We know that helping young people establish routines is critical to navigating uncertain times. It is our belief that creating a daily school-like experience for students will assist in creating normalcy where it may not otherwise exist. We recognize that it may cause extra work (and, potentially, stress) for families to help students create a school routine at home, but we believe it will be worth it, and we are here to help. Each student’s routine will vary, and we are not recommending a single model to follow – but, we highly suggest creating a regular time and space in which school work gets done each day! Of course, if there are barriers that arise for your family (e.g., illness), we ask you to reach out and let us know.

Our learning plans are highly digital. Obviously, they are not the same as what we would have done at school, where lessons would have been more personal and collaborative. But, we’ve done our best with this first week’s plan, and all of us – especially teachers – will be learning LOTS about how to do school in this new way – and we will revise as we go! We appreciate your patience as we (the teachers) learn to teach in these ways, and we will be interested in your feedback and good ideas about how Home Learning can improve as we go. Nonetheless, we hope you recognize the tremendous positive effort teachers have already invested to support students in making academic progress in our plans for Week One. We know that some of our students do not have the digital tools needed available at home. Please see the note below about how to access these tools from the school.

As you may have heard, the Governor has closed Massachusetts schools for three weeks – and it is highly likely that schools may be closed for even longer. Even though the main point is to keep everyone at home (and away from campus), some students and families may need to visit campus briefly to pick up personal items or materials needed for Home Learning. School staff will assist families with on-campus item retrieval needs (including technology, see below) on Tuesday, March 17th and Wednesday, March 18th, from 8:00 AM-12:00PM. More information about this will come in an email later today.

Digital Resources

Teachers will be using the desktop and online tools provided by Microsoft Office 365 for Home Learning, just as they do when we’re on campus. Some teachers may also choose to use other online tools and resources to support student learning at home. Students who already have personal computers (Macs, PC’s) at home can access the Office 365 environment by logging in as they would if on campus (and we recommend downloading the free software to your computers, rather than working in the web-based applications). Some students may not have a personal computer or may typically use a Chromebook, which is less predictable in its interaction with the Office 365 environment: for these students in particular—but this offer extends to all students—we’d like to get a school-issued laptop into their hands on Tuesday or Wednesday morning. We’re also aware that some students do not have internet access at home, and we have “hotspots” available to address that need. Click below if you want to reserve and pick up a school-issued laptop and/or hotspot on Tuesday or Wednesday morning. (If those times do not work for you, please indicate that in the surveys below.)

[To arrange for a laptop, click here](#)

[To arrange for a “hotspot,” click here](#)

Gateways/Graduation

We know that many of you will have questions about what Home Learning means for your spring academic goals and plans (e.g., gateways, graduation). There are still too many unknowns at this moment for us to address these questions

specifically -- but, rest assured that we know that you may be wondering about portfolio pieces and the like, and we are working on several potential plans to address these academic goals. In the short term, the best thing you can do is engage with the weekly work your teachers have outlined for you. If you experience challenges with engaging with this work, we ask you to email your teachers and/or advisor(s), who are available to you electronically.

A few thoughts on mental health, digital communication, and managing anxiety:

The COVID-19 pandemic is [inherently stressful](#) for students, staff, families, and communities. As we begin our first week of Home Learning, here are a few things to consider:

During home learning, “school time” is going to be more screen-heavy than our usual routines, with fewer opportunities to read body language and other non-verbal cues in online interactions. What adjustments do students need to make so that we can maintain a collaborative learning environment based on trust, decency, and mutual respect? Students, parents and Parker faculty agree that “reading tone of voice” or understanding what someone’s words really meant when you can’t see their facial expression can be challenging. We encourage students to be especially aware of this as we communicate with each other in ways that are different than our daily, in-person advisory circles, classroom tables, and walk-and-talk formats. Kindness, generosity of spirit, and understanding will go a long way as we negotiate uncharted waters together. If you are not sure what someone meant, assume best intentions, and then ask them to clarify!

As our learning becomes increasingly screen-based over the coming weeks, we encourage everyone to look for opportunities for students and their families to connect during this unprecedented period of social distancing. Where might you find times in the day for social media to be replaced with jigsaw puzzles, fort building, pleasure reading, exercise, cooking projects, or crafting? In the Home Learning plan that is being sent, you will see suggestions from Wellness for physical activity that can be done at home with minimal equipment. We encourage people to move! Additionally, numerous studies point to the benefits of being outside in nature in order to decrease symptoms of depression and anxiety. Family walks and hikes allow for both social distancing and self-care. [This article](#) may be helpful for those interested in this topic. Rest assured that as we go forward with this version of schooling, we will certainly be incorporating more ways for students to interact virtually into our school routines, and we will ramp up our use of video/video conferencing so that students have opportunities to see and hear their teachers and, at times, their classmates.

Even though there are no known cases of COVID-19 in the Parker community at present, there may well be some in the future. Should that happen, it will be important for us all to respect privacy, offer support, and avoid using the sort of humor that identifies individuals or speculates. Humor is a wonderful way to relieve anxiety, and a simple question such as “Are you feeling worried right now?” can help students talk about how they are feeling, what concerns they might have and what actions they might take to mitigate worry. For those noticing a marked uptick in anxiety, [here are some helpful ideas to explore](#).

Questions?

If you have a question about:	Please contact:
a specific class or assignment	the teacher of that class (see Parker email list here)
our approach to Home Learning (or ideas to share!)	email homelearning@theparkerschool.org
technical support	email helpdesk@theparkerschool.org
If you need to share information or access services about:	Please contact:
your family’s health information	email lzick@theparkerschool.org
mental health/emotional support needs	email skelly@theparkerschool.org
food insecurity/free and reduced school lunch needs	email mmckenna@theparkerschool.org

It is our intention to communicate frequently and try to support students and families as best we can! Thanks for sticking with us through this long email. Email #2 focuses specifically on the Home Learning plan for Week One. Questions? Email homelearning@theparkerschool.org!