

Dear CPS staff,

On March 16, Columbia Public Schools announced the closure of our schools effective at the end of the day on March 17. We anticipated the closure would include the remaining three days of that week, Spring Break, and two weeks after. We planned to be back in school on April 13. We planned for an unprecedented situation and rallied our staff to prepare to deliver instruction through alternative methods for those two weeks. We closed our buildings and our custodial teams started cleaning so the buildings would be clean and safe upon our return.

Almost immediately after our release, things started to change. Within a week, we learned of the first cases of COVID-19 in our community. Soon after that, our city and county issued a stay-at-home order, which required our district to adjust its timeline. April 13 has turned into April 27, and that will almost certainly change as federal and state leaders have extended physical distancing expectations to April 30. It appears to be just the beginning. Our spring break ended and we ambitiously embarked in Alternative Methods of Instruction (AMI) and almost immediately, our Learning Management System was overwhelmed both locally and nationwide. While that was temporary, it took little time for us to start receiving feedback from our community that what was being asked of our students was beyond the capacity many families could handle. Our teachers are trying to do what they do: teach. And students want to keep doing what they are supposed to do. But we are all trying to do business-as-usual in a context that is anything but usual.

Speaking plainly, we are in the midst of a global pandemic, and it is unreasonable to believe that our mission is the same as it was on March 17. If the modeling is correct, the Coronavirus is going to get worse. Our community will begin to struggle beyond the inconvenience of staying home and the real challenge of job loss and economic instability will be a reality. The CPS closure has been extended and we need to step back and re-evaluate how we move forward. A two-week patch is not possible. Our thinking has to change.

We need some time to adjust our expectations for staff and students. Effective immediately, we ask all classes to pause for the next three days. This pause means:

#### For Middle School and High School

- No assignments should be due in these three days;
- No grades should be added to a gradebook;
- No assessments should be administered;
- No deadlines should be looming over students;

#### For Elementary

- Please allow the packets to be the main source of instruction at this time and refrain from adding more;
- 5<sup>th</sup> graders using Schoology should have no assignments due in these three days;

#### For all Schools

- Teachers should continue to engage with students, checking in with them and providing them opportunities to connect with you and each other;

- Most importantly, make sure you and your family are OK. Connect with your family, friends, and colleagues.

In a few days, we'll have communication to more explicitly describe what will come in the future. That communication will include how assignments, grades and credit will be handled. Once we have those adjustments clearly defined for ourselves, we'll communicate those changes directly with families.

We have time. We need to take it. CPS is an essential part of this community and we must do our part to support our families and our students. We recognize that our reality is not just about education, but about the balance of providing normalcy and a structure for students amidst mounting pressures. We recognize that our job is to attend to the real concerns our children, families, and colleagues face as they consider how COVID-19 is impacting our local community as well as the entire nation. As we come together with our staff, students and community, we need to face this challenge together. What that means is we will work together to continue to adjust as we evaluate the needs of our learners, faculty/staff and community.

Very sincerely,  
Jen Rukstad  
Jill Brown