

Dear East Lansing Public Schools Families,

Greetings from the Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment Office!

I want to take a minute to update you on the district's **current plans** concerning online learning during this time of school closure. Please know that as we receive updated information and guidance, what I share with you today could change as early as tomorrow ☺. We have heard from many of you about the challenge of keeping your students educationally engaged during this unprecedented time. ELPS wants very much to respond and support you as much as possible, but I think it is important for you to understand the constraints we are facing concerning online learning. I have outlined below the current direction we have received from the Michigan Department of Education (MDE) and the Office of Civil Rights (OCR).

What is Clearly Appropriate and Encouraged?

- Although not required, we applaud the effort that has been made by many of our teachers to try to stay connected with your students. Whether online or through the US mail, efforts to say “hello” and “how are you” are awesome. Many of our students miss the love, support and encouragement they get from our teachers while in school, so this kind of outreach to your students is appreciated.
- This week, MDE and OCR have issued guidance about what kind of academic instruction teachers may provide for their students during this period of closure:
 - Teachers may review prior learning.
 - Teachers may make suggestions for optional learning activities.
 - Teachers may provide links to supplemental learning activities.
- For teachers who do share resources, we are encouraging them to collaborate with their grade level or department colleagues so that information is shared equitably to all of our students.

What Clearly Crosses the Line and is Not OK?

- School work may not be required.
- Student work may not be collected or graded.
- No instruction on new material may take place.
- No work may be “assigned” to students to complete.

- “Lessons” may not be recorded and sent to explain new content.

Why?

- If teachers cross the “line” outlined above, their instruction falls into the category of “Online Learning”. For school districts to adequately provide online learning they must be able to answer “Yes” to all of the following questions: *(Adapted from March 18, 2020 MDE Memo)*
 - Do ALL students have access to appropriate learning devices?
 - Do ALL students have access to the internet?
 - Can the district successfully support the needs of ALL learners? (Including all IEP, 504, English Learners and other student accommodations)
 - Have educators previously participated in professional learning opportunities that prepared them to transition teaching and learning online successfully?
 - Have students had enough prior exposure to online learning to be successful?
 - Does the district have in place an online management system to effectively support online learning?
- Our district is not currently in a position to effectively and equitably provide online learning that is accessible to all students.
- According to further communication we have received this week, a district that offers “Online Learning” and cannot provide this service as outlined above is at risk of disciplinary action from MDE and OCR.

ELPS believes in equal and equitable access to education for all of our students and as a district we are committed to this end. Although as a district we have been and will continue to be ready to teach our students within the walls of our classrooms, we are not positioned to translate this teaching to an online platform. Moving forward, ELPS plans to use the MDE guidelines as we explore online instruction.

As the uncertainty of this health crisis continues, our district will remain open to the direction of our state and federal leadership for ongoing guidance concerning online learning and will keep our families and students informed of any new information moving forward.

Please feel free to send me questions or concerns - I will do my best to address them fully.

Sincerely,

Glenn Mitcham
Director of Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment
East Lansing Public Schools

PS:

See these national news articles that give a broader scope of the online learning dilemma across the country:

<https://www.oregonlive.com/education/2020/03/coronavirus-closure-wont-lead-to-online-classes-in-oregon-public-schools-this-is-why.html>

<https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/education/2020/03/19/coronavirus-online-school-closing-special-education-teacher-distance-learning/2863503001/>