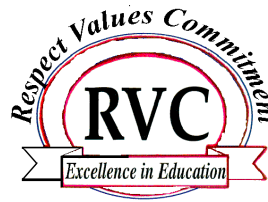


Rockville Centre Union Free School District



South Side Middle School

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Superintendent of Schools

SHELAGH MC GINN

Principal

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MICHAEL DUGGAN

Assistant Principal

April 3, 2020

Dear SSMS,

We are living in an extraordinary time where we are unable to live our lives in our typical fashion. Our new normal is social distancing, standing 6 feet apart, staying at home, and interacting mainly through technology. And we are all missing each other terribly. The main comment I hear during my different virtual meetings is that we all miss the comfort and routine of the South Side Middle School Day. Everyone, teachers, students and families, are doing a masterful job of adapting to this new life of remote learning. I really appreciate all that you are doing and feel so grateful to be a part of this endeavor.

This change in teaching and learning has been evolving on a daily basis. Decisions on the format of lessons and the delivering of instruction is continuously being modified and adjusted to meet the needs of the students. Teachers are continuing the process of exploring, learning, and implementing different means of instruction. We are moving from interactive discussion boards in google classroom to the use of collaborative white board lessons using software such as Educreations, which allows the teachers to actually use their voices to deliver the lesson.

The goal of the online learning or remote learning platform is the same as the goal of the live classroom. The main priority is student engagement. We want our students to continue to learn, to grow, to receive timely feedback from the teachers, and to stay connected to SSMS. There will be bumps in this road. Despite the best efforts of teachers and students, factors beyond anyone's control compromise the ability to keep up with the pace of a typical school day. We do not want this to have an emotional or psychological effect on our students. The teachers are giving deadlines, but the teachers are flexible. Please reach out to them for insight, advice or assistance. We know this is a struggle and a process for all. We are here to help.

We have decided to move to a Pass/Fail grading system for the third quarter. The report card, for the third quarter, will not reflect numerical grades but it will have comments from the teachers. The high school administration has been in contact with outside agencies, especially colleges and universities, to ensure that the recent events do not negatively affect the future plans for our students. This is particularly important for our 8th grade families to understand as some of the 8th grade courses will be reflected on the high school transcript. The Pass/Fail applied to the 3rd marking period only; a decision on the 4th quarter will be made when we have a better idea of our return date. We are awaiting guidance about the administration of the Regents Exams. We will keep you informed.

This pandemic has wreaked such havoc in our lives, but we must be mindful of the fact that we need to take care of ourselves and one another. This is a time when we need to use technology to our advantage. We are currently relying on remote communication where a tap on the screen has the power to pass on positive information, enhance a friendship, find assistance on lessons and set up virtual get togethers. Before we "push send", we need to think about what kind of information we are sending. Is it meant to be helpful or hurtful? Is it something that we would want to receive ourselves? We need to lift each other up as we move through this tumultuous time with positivity and care. There is a Chinese proverb that says, "Words have no wings, but they can fly a thousand miles." As we move forward, it is my hope that you will recall these words and the programs that were presented to you at South Side Middle School, and think before tapping that screen or pressing send.

We know that this school year is not progressing as we would have wished. We are particularly aware that not being able to spend these last months of 8th grade together is beyond disappointing. I am very mindful of the events that we will probably have to miss and we are not even sure whether we are returning to school this year. Please know, that the entire faculty is dedicated to “making up for lost time” to the best of our ability should we be able to return to school. I speak for everyone at SSMS – we love you, we miss you, and we cannot wait until we can be together again.

Stay healthy, practice kindness, remember that gratitude can be your attitude and take care of one another.

With love and respect,

Shelagh McGinn

Shelagh McGinn
Principal