

ISLIP PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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ASSISTANT SUPERINTENDENT OF
CURRICULUM & INSTRUCTION

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Dear Islip Parents and Guardians,

There have been some questions regarding remote and hybrid instruction that have recently been shared with us over the past several days. We have assembled our team to collaborate and answer these questions in the hopes of providing additional reasoning for our decisions. Your questions and suggestions are always important to us as we continue to navigate the nuances and changing guidance associated with this pandemic.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Chris Smalley", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Christopher Smalley, Ed.D.
Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum & Instruction

COMMITTED TO EXCELLENCE

The Islip School District hereby advises students, parents, employees and the general public that it offers employment and educational opportunities, without regard to sex, race, color, national origin or handicap. Inquiries regarding this non-discrimination policy may be directed to: Title IX Coordinator and/or Section 504 Coordinator. Location: Central Administration Building, 215 Main Street, Islip, New York 11751.

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

Q. *Why are a majority of teachers at the secondary level not providing extra help as promised in previous community discussions? We realize the ITA contract does not specifically have contract language mandating extra help, however during these unprecedented circumstances the students of the Islip School District need this support today, not tomorrow in a future negotiated contract. While following the in-person portion of the hybrid model, several teachers stay after school to provide this support to their students, but this support is virtually non-existent in the remote portion of the hybrid model. Students are falling behind and there are limited supports to help them.*

A. Extra help has always been different at the high school and the middle school. It has been available on a needs basis or on occasion when the teacher was going to review something before a test. This year, the middle school faced some obstacles in the morning extra help periods due to the new safety measures that needed to be implemented in our schools. This new safety measure meant that extra help would have to be implemented at the middle school in a way that was never done before. As a new system was being created, the teachers created an environment where they were more accessible than ever before. Teachers and students have been engaging each other in questions and answers beyond the traditional workday for months now. In addition, some of the extra help reviews that traditionally happened before the day have been happening during class time to the benefit of all students. Starting in January, middle school students will have an opportunity to sign up for extra support sessions. These sessions will happen once all the buses have dropped off students at the end of the day. This way all cohorts of students can have access to these Zoom sessions each time they happen. A detailed schedule is being created to maximize extra help at the middle school. This will be based on time slots and staff availability and some sessions may conflict with one another.

The high school provides extra help on a need-based schedule. Students contact teachers, and teachers make themselves available for support. The age of our high school students allows for this sort of model to work at this time. Many of our teachers have expanded their support windows at the high school to give more students access.

Q. Why are our children required to take attendance on a separate device when NYS regulations state that their teacher is the teacher of record? The Islip School District chose the Microsoft Teams platform for remote instruction, which has an automatic 2D compliant attendance feature. Why is that not being utilized? To add to the confusion, the live instruction component is through Zoom and not Teams, which seems to be creating the attendance issue. Many families are getting multiple attendance emails when the students actually did perform their online check-in. How can this problem be resolved? Is it due to the existence of two platforms? Can these procedures be combined in one consistent platform?

A. Students in Islip are not required to take their own attendance. We had initially rolled out a virtual check-in feature at the start of the school year to allow students to show that they are present in class while at home. The virtual check-in is the equivalent of a digital roll call. In a model where not every student has a camera turned on, the check-in provides teachers with assistance in determining that all students have checked in. The teachers then review the data and finalize the legal attendance based upon their evaluation of each student's presence during the lesson. Teachers are required to take attendance for every period.

Starting in January, the middle school will not be engaging in the virtual check-in experience through Infinite Campus anymore. This will cause some other areas to be worked on and revised. The asynchronous classes will have a different way for attendance because of this and that information will be shared from the middle school directly with everyone. The high school will continue with the virtual check-in.

The toggling between Zoom and Teams has not led to any attendance issues. We have found that both live platforms have different features that make them either better or worse for different types of courses or lessons within a course. Teams has an attendance feature but it does not connect to our student management system (Infinite Campus). Therefore, while it may be 2D compliant, the information does not get shared to the place where we capture attendance, therefore not satisfying the legal attendance-keeping requirement. Zoom and Teams continue to update their features and if there is a new feature rolled out, we will implement it.

Q. Why are some teachers not flexing, modifying and adjusting to the remote environment? For example: Tests/grading are not modified/differentiated for the remote environment, therefore causing lower GPA's even for our highest achieving students. We are not advocating for lower standards of excellence for our children, rather some flexibility and understanding with regard to grading

practices. It seems quite unfair and unreasonable to exact grades with the same degree of expectation as in a “normal” learning environment. At times, technical difficulties (both school and home related) have caused students to miss assignment deadlines, etc. and there have been instances of students being unfairly penalized for such events.

- A. Since the end of the 2019-2020 school year, districts across the country, including Long Island, embarked on the daunting task of developing re-opening plans for the fall of 2020. Districts needed to balance the logistics of health and safety while also implementing an entirely new way to provide instruction and learning methodology. Any scenario that did not include all students coming back to school (in-person) would create instructional, curricular, and engagement obstacles that have never been experienced before. All of the educators in the district have spent countless hours trying to create a dynamic that continues to provide high expectations while simultaneously modifying and adjusting the ways students can show what they know. Assessments have become much different this year to account for the fact that some students are in school while others are at home at the same time a test is given. Each course is intricate and designed in a way that makes sense for that course and that content. For this reason, the way in which assignments and assessments have been modified really depends on the academic level and specifics of each course.

Along with the shifting focus on instruction methods and modalities, grading practices have also become a critical element of our plan. At the end of the last year and carrying into the start of this year, our focus was to provide more consistency between courses of varying levels and departments from a grade standpoint. This was done to create fairness for all students and prevent situations where different courses weighted things differently. In most classes at the secondary level, summative assessments account for 40%, formative assessments account for 40%, and engagement counts for 20%. In most AP/Honors/College credit courses, those percentages change slightly but still show consistency. Specific course syllabus information provided by the teacher can give anyone more specific information on the grading practices. To date, this district has made incredible strides in our remote instructional capabilities, our comprehensive grading plans, and in closing the gap towards becoming a 1 to 1 district. We continue to improve with each week and continue to explore all available pathways capable of further developing our infrastructure, and the methods by which our teachers teach, and the experiences and environmental elements necessary for our students to succeed within the Covid-19 school year.

The following modifications and changes have been implemented within our departments and programs to best meet the needs of our current situation.

- Middle school and high school mid-terms have been canceled.

- Many assessments have become an open book with additional time added for completion shifting the focus to higher level thinking skills assessment tasks and questions.
- Assignment extensions are granted and there is much more leniency with due dates.
- Assessment structure has been altered to make doing them easier on a device.
- Engagement grades have been designed to be generous as to account for a myriad of concerns and issues that may be present in each household.
- Teachers are much more accessible on a regular basis. They have engaged with students well outside of the school day and weekends too when students inquire.
- Individual situations with student hardships have been handled with compassion and empathy.

We encourage parents or guardians who have any questions to always contact the teacher directly via email or call the department coordinator and/or principal. No question will go unanswered and there is never a reason to wait for clarification over long periods of time.

Q. *We are extremely alarmed that many teachers have canceled their Zoom instruction minutes prior to their scheduled time periods. There have also been many instances of teachers cancelling their entire week's scheduled Zoom meetings and are simply posting "busy work" on Teams. (Please see item 17 below for further concerns on this topic.)*

A. We are currently unaware of teachers cancelling Zoom sessions minutes prior to a scheduled period. We are also not aware of "busy work" being posted on Teams to alleviate the need to have a live teaching experience. If this is the case, this is best addressed with the teacher directly and then building administration. The teachers have responded exceptionally well to the current crisis and have changed their way of doing things to instruct students through all types of adversity. Many of our teachers who are on quarantine have been able to continue providing live-teaching experiences. These situations have required that the teacher at home coordinate with the substitute in the class so the lesson can be presented the same as it would have been if the teacher were in school. The management of, and participation in, this environment has been an adjustment for parents, students, and faculty, and we continue to improve each day and week. Our teachers and administrators are doing everything they can to make the process as smooth as it can be. We are continuing to improve these practices to insure teaching can happen even if a teacher is forced to stay home during a quarantine.

While we do not have any first-hand knowledge of the above question, it is possible that a class could be cancelled unexpectedly due to a true emergency. While that is very atypical, we think that perhaps that is how this question was generated.

- Q. *As it is widely recognized that students can become disengaged and apathetic without synchronous learning, we are highly concerned that certain core classes (and others) are not being taught live via Zoom on a regular basis. Students are missing out on the beneficial interactions with their teacher, losing the ability to ask questions and have them answered in real time, as well as engaging with their classmates. Recognizing there is no contractual obligation to hold live instruction, we have great concern about items 16 and 17 and therefore would like to ask for a revised schedule with (at the very least) ALL core subject area classes being held live consistently (and for a full period) over Zoom.***
- A.** All of our core classes are being taught live in the middle school and high school. The decision to go live when we did was based on our ability to do so. We had started out the year with a full asynchronous experience the days that the students were not in school. At this time, that has completely changed to a robust live-teaching model for students at home. By implementing a good number of technical enhancements, we began with live instruction at the start of October. The decision to have some of the non-core or electives be asynchronous when the student is not in school was a decision based on student engagement and potential fatigue. When students are in the home portion of the hybrid model, their days can be exceedingly long in front of a computer. The one way to alleviate this was to designate certain classes as an asynchronous experience when those students were not in school. We will continue to enhance all of these models.

The teachers, support staff, and administrators are here to help. Feel free to call your building principal, your guidance counselor, or child's teachers with any questions. We have also recently added a link on the district website where parents and students can ask questions or give suggestions regarding remote and hybrid learning. This can be found under the Parents/Student tab on the Islip School District website.