



## SPS Remote Learning:

### **Responding to the Challenges of Learning at Home During the COVID-19 Pandemic**

A Report for the School Committee

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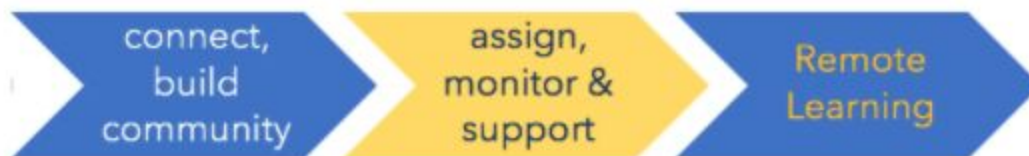
April 15, 2020

28 days, 20 major documents developed, hundreds of Zoom meetings and numerous communications...a lot has happened since we closed our doors on March 13th. I want to begin with a visual reminder of how we've responded to support students since Dr. Sawyer announced school closure.

**3/17-3/27**

**Started 3/30**

**Launched 4/7**



## Our Goals

As stated previously, Shrewsbury's Remote Learning plan was created to **keep our students connected to educators and classmates in ways that enhance their well-being, and engage students in distance learning with a focus on providing supports to help ALL students learn at home, and to maintain and develop key academic and critical thinking skills as well as to help students learn important academic content.** It's important to acknowledge, however, that our plan has been further developed and strengthened over time with input from both educators and families. We are grateful for the feedback we've received; with each communication, we've learned more about the structures our students and families find most supportive. Sometimes the feedback has been contradictory, and for understandable reasons.

A closer look at the language in our goal statements reveals the challenges inherent in the undertaking. As we began organizing with educators, district leaders grappled with questions like:

- Which is more important - connecting or content?
- How do we strike the balance between directed learning and choice?
- How will we help ALL students to learn at home when we're disconnected?
- If we can't replicate school entirely, what's the goal?
- Should we review key skills or teach new material, or both?
- Which academic content is most important?

There are many possible answers to these questions, and plenty of room for debate. Our educators couldn't begin to develop a coherent curriculum plan without making decisions. Yet no one wanted to keep students and families waiting while we deliberated. For that reason, as soon as the first "snow day" was declared, our curriculum teams began collaborating on the document known as [Learning Opportunity Resources](#). This was a good investment, as choice is critical to student motivation. Moreover, we suspected given our experiences with homework that a variety of options would be well received by families. Finally, we knew that the resource list would serve us well in the future as a "go to" place for high quality practice and enrichment materials. As information about the pandemic was shared, our plans shifted.

The table below illustrates the timeline for our actions, in accordance with guidance from state and federal agencies and in concert with our colleagues in nearby districts:

<b>Date</b>	<b>State &amp; Federal Guidance</b>	<b>SPS Actions</b>
Week of March 9th	On a conference call scheduled for March 13, the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) advised districts that they should remain open unless advised by their local Department of Public Health to close. Further, the DESE stated that per the Centers for Disease Control guidelines that if advised to close, districts should close individual school(s) and not the entire district.	<p>On March 12, Dr. Sawyer decided to close school on March 13 due to further developments related to the coronavirus situation. On March 13, he decided to close our district schools for the following week out of an abundance of caution.</p> <p>Work began on resources for students and families opting into learning experiences at home. Because March 13 and March 16 were treated like "snow days" in order to add those days to the end of the school calendar in June, those were not work days for SPS educators. Administrators worked on those days.</p> <p>With the likelihood that a longer period of school closure was imminent, SPS began</p>

		discussions about how to support families during disruption of school.
Week of March 16th	<p>On Sunday, March 15, the Governor closed all public schools in Massachusetts through April 6.</p> <p>In accordance with guidance shared by the <a href="#">U.S Department of Education</a>, the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) informed public school districts via conference call that providing mandatory “virtual classes” would be a violation of civil rights and special education law with regard to equitable student access, and indicated all learning opportunities should be optional.</p>	<p>On March 16, SPS released Learning Opportunity Resources, communicating our initial “opt in” approach to learning experiences in accordance with DESE guidance while beginning outreach to families.</p> <p>On their own, educators across the district reached out to connect with students in a variety of ways and using different formats with a focus on health and well-being</p> <p>SPS began to organize food delivery for families in need</p>
	<p>On Saturday, March 21st The U.S. Department of Education released <a href="#">supplemental guidance</a> stating that ensuring compliance with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), † Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act , and Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act should not prevent any school from offering educational programs through distance instruction.</p>	<p>SPS leadership team discussed implications for planning, including how we might support students and families with diverse needs during a period of school closure.</p>
Week of March 23rd	<p>On March 25th Governor extends school closure for all public schools in Massachusetts through May 4th</p>	<p>SPS shifted our approach to prepare for a new phase of remote learning, including planning for how we could support families of students with special needs.</p> <p>SPS took an inventory and developed protocols for providing iPads to students.</p>
	<p>On March 26th Commissioner Jeff Riley (DESE) released <a href="#">Remote Learning Recommendations</a> to districts, signaling new expectations for assigned work and outreach..</p>	<p>On that same day (March 26th), the district issued <a href="#">goals and guiding principles for remote learning</a>.</p> <p>Based on the updated DESE guidance, the next day (March 27th) SPS launched its next phase of remote learning to include assigned work, with a focus on</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recommended times for learning</li> </ul>

		<p>by level</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assigning and collecting student work, and</li> <li>• Providing students feedback</li> </ul>
Week of March 30th	<p>In his <a href="#">Letter to Families about Remote Learning</a> on March 30th, Commissioner Jeff Riley informed parents about shifts in remote learning, signaling new expectations for assignments and outreach alongside ongoing concerns about equity and access.</p> <p>On Friday, April 3rd Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education issued guidance on English Language learners.</p>	<p>SPS continues planning work to add additional dimensions to remote learning, including working through privacy and legal issues related to video conferencing.</p> <p>Teacher planning teams are established for collaboration and to provide consistency and redundancy.</p> <p>SPS Information Technology Department began distributing devices to families on Tuesday March 31st. Director Kathy Lange-Madden began distributing information to staff, and checking our plans against state guidance.</p>
Week of April 6th	<p>On April 6, the DESE released a document entitled <i>Supporting Students with Disabilities for All Educators and Providers</i> which stated that 'districts should ensure all online learning platforms meet confidentiality and student privacy, and electronic content accessibility standards.'</p>	<p>On April 6th SPS released a formal memo to staff and families regarding the district plan for remote learning, including "live" interactions with students, virtual "office hours" and the plan to begin teaching new skills and concepts. Live interactions began on April 8th for the middle level and April 9th for the elementary and high school levels.</p> <p>SPS sought and secured additional technology tools matched to our educational goals and privacy needs.</p> <p>On April 7th Dr. Sawyer surveyed staff and families regarding April vacation; on April 8, the School Committee voted to change April 21, 22, &amp; 23 from vacation days to remote learning days.</p> <p>Teams of educators continued to collaborate on further improvements to remote learning; they refined plans and created additional instructional materials (including more district-created video content) to be provided the week of April 13th.</p>

The flow of information about the impact of the virus was fast-paced. In contrast, communications at the state level were slow to respond to emerging needs. It's worth noting, for example, that the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education did not release formal guidance to districts on remote learning until March 26th. For that reason the vast majority of Massachusetts school districts, including all local Central Massachusetts districts, did exactly what Shrewsbury did for the first two weeks. When guidance changed, SPS was ready to act.

## From Optional “Learning Opportunities” to Consistent Expectations

In the first ten days ( the “optional” phase) we learned several things worth noting:

- Parents need help navigating which resources are the best match for their child's needs
- Students are best supported when teachers match learning tasks to students' specific needs wherever possible, and
- Children are most likely to persevere when they receive guidance and feedback.

When extended closure was recently confirmed, it was clear that students and families needed clear direction, streamlined communication, predictable schedules, robust assignments specific to grade level goals, and opportunities to connect.

I remain incredibly proud of the ways our educators rose to the challenge of meeting all of these needs- both as teachers and learners. It's important that the community understand that, together with working adults everywhere, our staff is learning new skills as they come to terms with a “new normal”. For this reason, our educators are well-positioned to support families; their outreach is informed by their own experience, and inspired by a deep desire to maintain connections with our students and their families despite the distance.

## What is Remote Learning?

Although we aspire to do all we can to maintain connections between home and school during this period of closure, it's simply not possible to replicate the vibrant nature of a classroom at a distance. Remote learning is not merely online learning; we want our students to experience the richness of diverse learning experiences, including teacher-directed assignments, options to engage with content in multiple modalities, interdisciplinary projects, nature walks,, and integrated experiences with Art,

Conversations will not be cancelled.  
Relationships will not be cancelled.  
Love will not be cancelled.  
Songs will not be cancelled.  
Reading will not be cancelled.  
Self-care will not be cancelled.  
Hope will not be cancelled.  
May we lean into the good stuff that remains.



Music, Media and Physical Education. Just as importantly, we seek to maintain connections with classroom communities and further opportunities for social emotional learning. Finally, choice and enrichment encourage our students to be self-directed. Accordingly, we have structured remote learning plans purposefully to include pencil and paper practice of academic skills, online learning opportunities, and interactive experiences that engage students and connect them to their teacher, other educators,, and their classmates for the purpose of reviewing material, applying new skills and learning new concepts aligned with grade level standards.



Our special educators and related service providers are collaborating daily with general education teachers, families and students to meet student needs and ensure access in this remote learning environment. The extended school closure has impacted our students with disabilities in many ways and their teachers are working through new challenges presented in the home environment, in addition to the curriculum based work special educators have always done.

In my upcoming presentation I look forward to giving the larger community a “behind the scenes” glimpse into what remote teaching and learning looks like on the school side. I will also share some specific examples of what “robust” looks like at each level.

## Planning with Diverse Needs in Mind

In keeping with our [guiding principles](#), our planning has also taken into account how we can do this work in redundant ways given that many of our educators are or may end up in situations where they are unavailable to work due to illness, family illness, or otherwise caring for their own children and family members during this pandemic. One of the positive changes we’ve experienced as a result of the crisis is that our educators have organized in new ways.



ELA Content Team Members Mondays @ 12:45 ZOOM:	Math Content Team Members Mondays @ 1:30 ZOOM:	Science/ Social Studies Content Team Members Mondays @ 2:15 ZOOM:	All Grade 1 Thursdays @ 12:45 ZOOM:
Beal - Sarah Zakar	Beal - Emily Chaves	Beal - Lisa McKiernan	Beal: Sarah Zakar Emily Chaves Lisa McKiernan
Coolidge - Leah Terrasi Coolidge - Tiffani Grillo Coolidge - Joan O'Brien (SLP)	Coolidge - Cheryl Mongeon Coolidge - Brianna Hamel (SPED)	Coolidge - Linda McQuade	Coolidge: Leah Terrasi Tiffani Grillo Cheryl Mongeon Brianna Hamel (SPED) Linda McQuade Joan O'Brien (SLP)
Floral - Elizabeth Marciello Floral - Meaghan McCarthy	Floral - Tina McGrail Floral - Tara Plourde Floral - Ashley Walker (SPED)	Floral - Kara Frankian	Floral: Elizabeth Marciello Meaghan McCarthy Tina McGrail Tara Plourde Ashley Walker (SPED) Kara Frankian
Paton - Meghan White Paton - Jenna Violette Paton - Rebekah Landers (SPED)	Paton - Jenny White	Paton - Emily Walker	Paton: Meghan White Jenna Violette Rebekah Landers (SPED) Jenny White Emily Walker
Spring - Christina Baumann Spring - Elizabeth McRae	Spring - Noreen Camerato	Spring - Susan Brand	Spring: Christina Baumann Elizabeth McRae Noreen Camerato Susan Brand

Across grade spans at every level educators are collaborating in new configurations.

 **Jane O. Lizotte**  
@SPS\_Partners

Calling SHS Juniors! Are you seeking to explore college, career, and life after high school NOW? SHS alumni are collaborating virtually with interested juniors. You can't pass this up! Check your Schoology acct. for more information! @SPS\_Partners #ShrewsburyLearns @SHSColonials

3:50 PM · Apr 8, 2020 · Twitter Web App

 **SHS\_Unified**  
@SHS\_Unified

Jenny's been spending a lot of time baking while she's been home, something she loves to do. Can't wait to bake together when we get back to school!  
#chefJenny #ShrewsburyLearns #apartbutunited



The snapshot of the first grade content team document pictured below depicts the complexities of planning for online learning in a remote environment:

Power Standards for reading are highlighted.		Websites	Discussion Prompts	Reading Response Choices	More Reading Passages	Phonics	Fluency	Writing	Foundations	Lexia
Literature	Informational	<a href="#">Scholastic Learn at Home</a>	<a href="#">Emergent Readers</a>	<a href="#">Fiction and NonFiction</a>	<a href="#">Grade One Reading Passages with discussion questions</a>	<a href="#">Alphabet Linking Chart</a>	<a href="#">Poetry Book</a>	<a href="#">Scrambled Sentences</a>	<a href="#">Vowel Extension</a>	<a href="#">Parent Information</a>
RL 1.1 Ask and answer questions about key details in a text.	RI 1.1 and Ask and answer questions about key details in a text.	<a href="#">Epic</a>	<a href="#">Early Readers</a>	<a href="#">Levels F-U</a>		<a href="#">Final Sound Game</a>			<a href="#">Writing Paper</a>	<a href="#">Lexia Close Reads Sets 1-6</a>
RL 1.2 Retell stories, including key details, and demonstrate understanding of their central message or lesson	RI 1.2 Identify the main topic and key details of a text	<a href="#">ReadWorks</a>	<a href="#">Transitional Readers</a>	<a href="#">Various options for writing paper</a>		<a href="#">Digraph Bingo</a>			<a href="#">Level 1 Story Time</a>	
RL 1.3 Describe characters, setting, and major events in a story, using key details.	RI 1.3 Describe the connection between 2 individuals, events, ideas, or pieces of information in a text	<a href="#">Newsels</a>	<a href="#">Discussion Starters for Fiction and NonFiction</a>			<a href="#">My Vowel Book</a>			<a href="#">Level 2 Story Time</a>	
RL 1.7 Use illustrations and details to describe its characters, setting, or events.	RI 1.4 Students will be able to ask and answer questions about key details in a text to help determine or clarify the meaning of words and phrases	<a href="#">RAZ kids</a>							<a href="#">Gr K Foundations at Home Resources</a>	
RL 1.6: Identify who is telling the story at various points in a text.		<a href="#">Lexia</a>							<a href="#">Gr 1 Foundations at Home Resources</a>	
Links to Instructional Videos		<a href="#">Audible</a>								
<a href="#">How To Retell a Story For Kids</a>		<a href="#">Reading A-Z</a>								
		<a href="#">Storyline Online</a>								
		<a href="#">Common Lit</a>								
		<a href="#">Shrewsbury Public Library Tools</a>								
		<a href="#">Look up resources by standard</a>								

Most importantly the plans our educators have assembled demonstrate a shared commitment to our guiding principles and core values.

Please use the links below to access the Remote Learning Plans provided for students at the elementary level for the week of April 13th. These links with assignments and resources for the following week are emailed to families on the prior Friday afternoon.

- [PreK](#)
- [Kindergarten](#)
- [First Grade](#)
- [Second Grade](#)
- [Third Grade](#)
- [Fourth Grade](#)

Assignments at the middle and high school levels are provided through the Schoology learning management system. The following links are to planning documents in core content areas that provide insight into what is being assigned to students at these levels. More examples, including special subjects, will be provided through the presentation at the meeting.



Please note that these links may not be accessible to the public when this document is posted to our website as they are part of our internal system.

The following links will connect you to learning plans for Grades 5-8.

### **Grade 5**

[Remote Learning Plan Grade 5 MA/SCI](#)

[Remote Learning Plan Grade 5 ELA](#)

[Remote Learning Plan Grade 5 SS](#)

### **Grade 6**

[Remote Learning Plan Grade 6 MA/SCI](#)

[Remote Learning Plan Grade 6 ELA](#)

[Remote Learning Plan Grade 6 SS](#)

### **Grade 7**

[Remote Learning Plan Grade 7 MA](#)

[Remote Learning Plan Grade 7 ELA](#)

[Remote Learning Plan Grade 7 SCI](#)

[Remote Learning Plan Grade 7 SS](#)

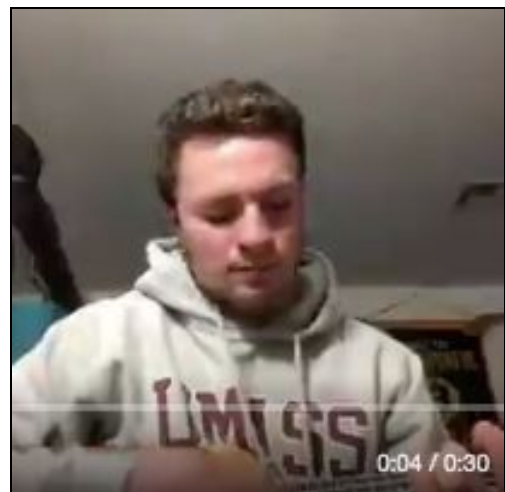
### **Grade 8**

[Remote Learning Plan Grade 8 MA](#)

[Remote Learning Plan Grade 8 ELA](#)

[Remote Learning Plan Grade 8 SCI](#)

[Remote Learning Plan Grade 8 SS](#)



Finally, here are some examples of expectations for students at SHS:

- [English Department](#) “warehouse” of required assignments, including work in progress
- [Social Sciences Department](#) unit guide for U.S. History
- Mathematics Department [“Playlist”](#)
- Science Department plans: [Chemistry](#) & [Honors Physics](#)

## **Looking Ahead**

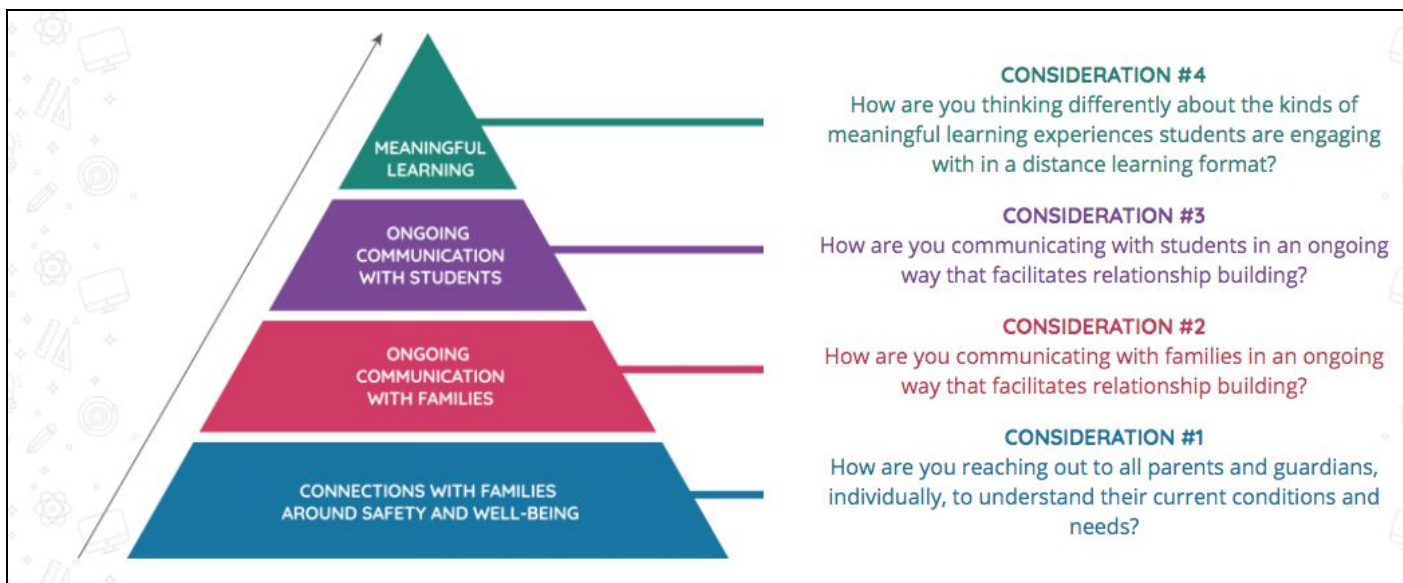
Is our plan perfect? Far from it. Just like students and families across the nation, we are learning and adapting to new constraints and possibilities. Inevitably, despite our hard work and ongoing efforts, significant challenges remain:

- As of Friday, 688 families at the Elementary level had not registered for a Google account. This makes it difficult to engage them with the online tools we have purchased.
- Brian L'Heureux and the Information Technology team continue to actively distribute iPads to families that meet district criteria.
- The lack of a common online learning platform at Preschool through Grade 4 and the lack of a 1:1 take-home digital device program for these levels creates barriers for accessing resources.
- Challenges for students in a remote learning environment include supporting those with the most complex needs. Mental and behavioral health have been impacted significantly by extended closure.
- Special Education federal and state advisories and guidance are continuing to evolve regarding procedural requirements creating challenges to meeting student needs and creating significant procedural burdens.
- In Shrewsbury only 3% of our students are considered English Language learners. However 36% of our families report that their first language is not English. Kathleen Lange-Madden, Director of English Language Education, and her team of ESL educators have leveraged every available resource to translate district documents and to support families that speak other languages than English at home as they grapple with the numerous communications necessitated by the pandemic.
- We have conflicting feedback from families, some of whom want more instructional interaction and curriculum content, and some of whom feel that what is being asked of their children and themselves is too much.
- The younger the students, the more challenging it is for parents and caretakers, as young children naturally require more direct assistance and have shorter attention spans.

## Closing Thoughts

Deepak Chopra once said, “All great changes are preceded by chaos”. The pandemic has certainly wrought its fair share of both. Shrewsbury is a community capable of surmounting these barriers, and our teachers are leading by example. As a district we are collaborative by nature, committed to student outcomes by design, and eager to improve. It’s important to understand that remote learning cannot replicate “real school”, and we are keenly feeling that loss.

This infographic from the [Highlander Institute](#), an educational think tank, depicts the important components to be considered in a remote learning plan. Our efforts have been informed by “best practice” as well as the general knowledge base that governs teaching and learning principles.



No remote learning plan is perfect- precisely because it is remote. I want to reassure you that without the power to fill our classrooms, we are doing our very best to empower our students and their teachers to persevere at a time of tremendous change and challenge.

In partnership with families, I am confident that what we have built will improve the quality of teaching and learning--not just for now but for the long term.

I look forward to talking more about that in our next meeting. Thank you for the opportunity.

