

Memo 3: Tools, Resources, and Strategies for Remote Learning

March 19, 2020

The Deans and Divisions will be sending this as a regular series as we learn from each other during the extended closure. To clarify, we are considering [the original memo here](#) as part 1, and we are attaching [memo 2 here](#).

The theme of this installment is **Sustainability and Longevity**. We recognize and want to take into account that remote learning requires a lot of time and attention to plan and a lot of energy to engage in. We thus want to use this memo to promote strategies and principles that will help us--faculty, students, and families--to sustain during this complex and stressful time.

Borrowing from last week's theme of **Flexibility and Adaptability**, we also want to continue to adapt in order to create a remote learning plan that we can successfully implement for the length of the closure. We're only in the early days of this, and with a return date of no sooner than April 27th, it's important to consider what is possible for a long stretch. We'll try to roll out these changes weekly within these memos (rather than more frequently) in order to ensure that we are responding to the feedback we are receiving from faculty, students, and families, but not confusing anyone with multiple or daily communications to recommend change.

Based on the feedback we have received so far, we want to implement the following adaptations and reinforce some principles as we plan for and enter next week:

Supporting a Sustainable Workload for Students

Reduce Screen time

- Please preserve the natural breaks within our existing schedule by not scheduling required meetings for students during break time or lunch. Students need breaks between classes to meet their biological needs (bathroom, food, stretch, or even tend to family needs).
 - We ask that you especially **not** schedule required meetings during lunch time (11:20-12:10pm). If a student initiates or requests a meeting, that is fine, but avoid lunch as an academic meeting time.
- In planning your classes and curriculum, we also ask that you consider some tasks and assignments that don't require screen time. Talk to peers, your Department Chair, or Dean to generate off-screen options for assignments and assessments.

Reduce Work and Homework load

We have received a lot of feedback already that indicates students are feeling overwhelmed by the amount of work. The tasks associated with remote learning require more time on the part of students for various reasons:

- They are being asked to process a lot of instruction and to navigate different organizational structures, all without the motivation and oversight typically provided by teachers and peers.
- Many of our students have processing speed issues or learning differences that make working through so much online text challenging.
- They are generally anxious about the current situation, making it harder to focus for sustained periods of time without the natural breaks school provides.

For Middle School

We are asking that **you assign no more than 20 minutes of work to be considered “homework” for each class.** For Middle School classes, we ask that **if at all possible, do not assign homework beyond what it will take that day during your 80 minutes of class.** For Middle School kids, that might be approximately 45-60 minutes of “in class” work because they need time for brain breaks and to process. A good guideline is not more than 1.5-2 hours of work outside of their regular class time in aggregate of all classes (because we are hearing that even that is a lot right now).

For Upper School

We are asking that **you assign no more than 20-30 minutes of work to be considered homework each class. If at all possible, don’t assign work beyond what it will take that day during your 80 minutes of class.** We definitely do not want students spending more than 3 hours of work outside of their regular class time (and even that is a lot right now).

We understand that for some teachers, these restrictions will be frustrating. Again, we are making decisions by taking into account a lot of feedback received and doing what we believe will help everyone to sustain during a complex time.

We also know this means scaling back your curriculum and its learning goals and objectives. As communicated in the previous memo, this is completely acceptable, and even necessary at this time. We want to keep kids learning and engaged while having realistic expectations given unprecedented circumstances.

Sustaining Student Motivation

Feedback garnered from the Upper School [Student Feedback survey](#) (sent out on Sunday in the ASB newsletter and via Advisory on Monday) indicates that the majority of student concerns involve:

- (1) managing workload, both assignments to be completed in class and for homework (in general and in relation to family commitments at home)
- (2) struggling to adjust to more isolated daily life. Our students are missing the companionship of their friends and the social connection that comes from advisory, clubs, and extracurriculars as they also navigate fluctuating intrinsic motivation to complete their schoolwork.

Though there is no one way to motivate students during this time, it’s important to:

- Find ways to create community in your classroom when possible;
- Give students choice and ownership where appropriate in your curriculum;
- Be flexible with students and not use grades punitively;
- Provide them with feedback in effort to coach, evaluate, and show support.

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Supporting a Sustainable Workload for Teachers

Reduce Screen time

- Please preserve the natural breaks within our existing schedule by not scheduling required meetings for adults during break time or lunch. Adults also need the breaks between classes to meet their biological needs (bathroom, food, stretch, or tending to family needs and concerns).
- We understand that many grade-level, discipline-specific, or project teams have relied on the lunch period to meet. We ask, as much as possible, that you avoid requiring or scheduling meetings with colleagues during lunch time (11:20-12:10pm) in an effort to make the daily schedule more sustainable.

Offline Hours

- Set clear digital boundaries in order to maintain your offline hours. We know that the context of remote learning can lead to a sense that time is collapsing and that we should be even more available online to our students. We encourage you to use this moment, still early in our remote learning experience, to establish firm outside of class time(s) when you are available to students to give extra help (if you plan to set outside of class meeting times). This will help students to plan and build their schedules and help teachers to preserve their time as well.

Planning Strategies

- For those teachers who are teaching multiple sections of the same class, consider collaborating across sections to offer the same or similar curriculum.
- Though we value autonomy, during this time, the more we can work together when planning for like courses (multiple teachers who teach History 7, multiple teachers who teach Bio, etc.), the more flexibility we have if we need to support each other.

Asynchronous Teaching and Learning

We recognize that a best practice for online learning includes synchronous teaching. We do recommend you have a real-time check-in with kids (one-on-one, small groups, and/or full class) at least once a week, and many of you will do synchronous short discussions, lessons, or conferences with kids at different points in the week.

That said, we have to think about sustainable practices at this time, and **daily, synchronous teaching and learning for the duration of a block and for multiple classes is not something most teachers can sustain** while also taking care of themselves, their families, and their communities.

- Be intentional about choosing the duration of synchronous class check-in times. 80 minutes of synchronous learning in each block is not advisable for students. Consider moving to 1-2 synchronous checkpoints throughout the week.
- We should all consider at least some asynchronous teaching: asynchronous tasks allow more flexibility for kids who would benefit from working more at their own pace during this time, and allows for more flexibility for teachers.
- Just as you would allow students time to work more independently during class, you can and should allow students time to work during your remote classes.
- Asynchronous teaching allows you to move forward tasks and curriculum even if you can't "attend" your class that day. For longevity, we need to think about the possibility of more people needing to step away to tend to their health or that of others for a single day or more.

Supporting Sustainable Schoolwide Systems

Attendance Protocol Adjustment

In an effort to reduce the number of mass communications going home, we are no longer having the front desk send an email home each time a student is absent from class (Marie sent over 105 emails home one morning to US parents).

- Teachers will continue to take attendance as planned for each block by 4 pm.
- Marie (US) and Rachel (MS) will mark each student as present for the day if they are present for at least one class, or absent for the day if they were absent in all of their classes.
- They will only send emails home when a student is marked absent for the day (missed all of their classes).
- Teachers should continue to reach out to students and families if a student does not engage in their class and fill out the [form](#) if a student does not engage for two consecutive classes.

Schoology Pages

We continue to ask: **make sure that your Schoology page includes a clear agenda for each day (posted by 8:15) and consider how you can use this to reduce the cognitive load for students.**

In one easily accessible page/slide/folder, have an agenda for that day that consolidates information:

- Include assignment links and/or any relevant instructions;
- Include clear due dates and times;
- Include links for Google Meets or other live/real-time applications;
- A suggested example can be found [here](#); for MS, use the agreed upon agenda format for the grade-level team.

Reminders:

- **Office Hours:** The Deans and Division will continue to host a Google Meet office hours, but starting next week due to low demand, we'll reduce the hours: **Mondays and Tuesdays from 9am-10am.** Please also feel free to continue to contact your Department Chairs, Dean, or Division team with questions or concerns. And share with each other, as you all are doing!
- **[Faculty School Closure Schoology Page](#):** Please continue to use this page. We will house assignments for faculty there, including relevant checklists and memos to read, and we will continue to read and respond to questions that appear on the forum.
- **[Leave/Substitute Protocol](#):** Please see [this protocol](#) if you are unable to tend to your remote classes on a given day.
- We will continue to recommend resources, but please reach out if you are searching for a tool or strategy. For now, [we highly recommend this short article](#), which offers messages aligned with this memo: