

A Message to Needham Public Schools Middle School Students
from Superintendent of Schools Dan Gutekanst
April 24, 2020

Hi, I am Dan Gutekanst the Superintendent of the Needham Public Schools. You may have seen me visit one of your classes this year with Ms. Downey or Ms. Bibbo, or maybe I joined your lunch table in the cafeteria for one of those delicious chicken patty sandwiches. (By the way, I don't know about you, but I miss those chicken patties!!) I have been thinking a lot about you and your families over the last few weeks and days, and, well, I miss you! And your teachers miss you, too. I thought I would send you a brief video message to talk about school and the rest of the year.

I'm sitting here at Pollard in an empty classroom, and let me tell you it is very quiet! It is strange to be here without the energy, activity, and excitement of students filling the hallways. Your teachers and I wish you were here right now preparing for declamations, completing a science lab, writing speeches, or maybe prepping for the Pig Races or planning for Field Day at DeFazio. We all wish we could be in school right now, but we also know it's important for you to stay home and stay healthy until science and medicine can catch up with and defeat, or at least manage, COVID-19 so it is no longer a threat.

I know that your teachers are trying to stay connected to you, maybe through phone calls, emails, and video chats or lessons. I know they are sharing ideas for reading, exploring, and learning, and I hope you are paying attention and participating as much as possible. I know it's a challenge to learn in this new way and share your iPad or computer with a brother or sister, but you can do it. Your teachers are very busy creating new lessons and experiences for you to try at home and on your own; you have to become an independent learner who can be flexible, mature, resilient and patient—and it's a good thing to take charge of your learning! Being an independent learner who does not need an adult to manage all of your activities all the time is pretty important, especially when you head to high school in the fall.

Your parents and family, too, are now also taking responsibility for your learning. And I know that's difficult for busy families and adults who are trying to balance their own work obligations with managing the household and making sure you can attend to your schoolwork. I hope you are being immensely helpful, therefore, maybe reading to a brother or sister or walking the dog even early in the morning when you'd rather sleep in a little longer. Your parents and the adults who care for you have a lot on their minds, and you can do your part by attending to your school work, reading, or helping around the house in a way you never have before. Learning from home means, for example, completing an assignment without prodding, practicing for the upcoming virtual poetry day at Pollard or tackling chores with a smile when your parents are

involved in a meeting. This time at home is the best opportunity to show how mature, independent, and responsible you can be!

This week the Governor announced all schools will be closed for the rest of the year, and so now we know you can't return to school and see your teachers and friends. Up until the last day of school, Friday, June 19th, your teachers will continue to provide new opportunities for learning, and I will expect that you will participate in that work, complete your assignments, and check in with your teacher. Your teachers are also thinking and reflecting about how they can provide additional and extra opportunities to interact with you and make sure you are connected to your classmates and friends. They are right now thinking about new lessons and ways to make sure that you continue to learn so you are prepared and ready for Pollard or the high school in the fall. We will work over the summer to clean the school, prepare your classroom, and ready materials for your first day back at school on September 2nd. And for 6th graders, Pollard Principal Ms. Bibbo and Pollard teachers are excited to meet you sometime this summer to give you a tour of the school. For 8th graders, High School Principal Mr. Sicotte is also preparing a visit and tour of Needham High School for incoming ninth graders. So, don't worry about that: We've got you covered! You'll hear more about summer visits to Pollard and Needham High at a later time.

For now, your job is to be safe and healthy, help out around the house, and participate in and complete the lessons your teachers provide for you. Also, if you need to contact one of your teachers, a counselor, or administrator at school, please email them and they will get back to you. Because even though the schools are closed, your mind and heart are open for growing, learning and caring.

I look forward to seeing you again soon!