



Livingston PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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Dear Livingston Public Schools Community:

The perceived advantages that come with completing assessments remotely, and the desire to avoid in-class tests and quizzes, have increasingly become primary reasons for some students not to attend school in-person. Simply put, students are opting to be remote because they can take advantage of the comfort and absence of supervision connected with taking tests at home. As we prepare to welcome more students back to our facilities on April 5th, we hope to reverse this trend. We want our students consistently in school, in person.

Overcoming this issue will require that schools and families work together. As a community, we need to collectively reject the notion that, whether you are a hybrid or fully-remote student, trying to gain an advantage by taking assessments at home is acceptable. We should also send a united message to students that going to school is not optional (if signed up for hybrid). If adults give either explicit or implicit endorsement of "the benefits" of staying at home for assessments, it will be increasingly more difficult to hold students accountable for their learning.

Avoiding in-class assessments can negatively impact students both in the short and long term, and in a multitude of ways. As students reap the short-term gains from taking assessments remotely, their mastery of the content, test-taking skills, self-confidence, and their perceived value of academic honesty can suffer long term. As we return to a more "typical" school year next year, students in next level courses will be accountable for knowledge and skills for which they have demonstrated mastery this year. Not experiencing assessments as assigned can be a detriment to them in future years at LPS and beyond.

It is not a reasonable solution to provide in-person learners with the same "benefits" as those who are at home in order to level the playing field, as has been suggested. Assessments are important learning tools, not simply grade producers. When children are permitted to avoid the experience of having their knowledge and skills accurately assessed, the message to the students is that undermining the academic assessment process is acceptable. Having an opportunity to operate outside the teacher's assessment guidelines with minimal risk of accountability should not make doing so tolerable, nor should we set aside good instructional practice simply to appease those who are working to circumvent the learning process.

We have considered whether penalizing students for their absences would help solve this issue. Penalties for absences in the current environment are a double-edged sword. If we enact consequences for physical absences when hybrid students choose to log in remotely, we will likely drive more students into full-remote learning, undermining our desire to bring more students back to school. If we don't provide consequences, we create spotty in-school attendance making it difficult to stabilize our schedule. There is no easy solution to this problem.

We are taking steps to address our instructional practices as they relate to this issue. We are working with teachers to make our assessments more holistic and authentic, thereby measuring learning in ways that make dishonesty significantly more difficult. We will continue to do so, since we know some of our students will continue to learn remotely through the end of the year. We have also worked to identify academic dishonesty and address it. When we are aware of it, we provide consequences per our Code of Conduct. Our schools will continue to do all they can to become more creative in our assessment practices.

Our goal is to move in a positive direction both in terms of academic growth and consistent in-person attendance at our schools. To do so, we all must say clearly and consistently that taking assessments in-class is essential, and that the perceived immediate benefits of completing assessments remotely are small compared to the potential long-term consequences. Thank you for your ongoing partnership as we navigate these unprecedented times together.

Sincerely,

Matthew J. Block, Ed.D.
Superintendent of Schools