

Wednesday, April 22, 2020

Dear BMS Parents/Guardians:

As we begin to look to the end of the school year, I want to take some time to share a few important updates with you. First, I would like to recognize the amazing efforts of our students, families, faculty, and staff during this challenging season that we have navigated together. I recognize that while circumstances were not ideal, our joint distance learning efforts have helped our students to not only maintain their education, but also build new concepts and move forward with one another. Both students and teachers built their capacity to face new and uncomfortable challenges during a historical world-wide crisis. Staying focused each day on family wellbeing, individual academic achievement, and unique fellowship opportunities, our BMS family and patron body has done great things for the good of our students and their future.

While taking into consideration the time and efforts that have gone into remote learning in a variety of formats at both levels as well as some other significant factors, I have collaborated with my administrative team to establish some concrete end dates for distance learning. It has been my desire to not only recognize the need for students and families to decompress and reset while taking care of lingering assignments, but to also acknowledge the loss of normal end-of-year fun activities and special events through the month of May (including class trips, assemblies, and unique learning/fellowship experiences). I am so proud of how everyone responded and jumped to action during this time of learning and trusting God in unfamiliar territory. Additionally, I am grateful for the opportunity we have had to collaborate with and respond to so many families for the good of our kids!

Regarding the time frame of the close of this school year (particularly distance learning - since we have otherwise been functioning under the indefinite state closure), I have discussed with colleagues and decided upon two staggered ending dates for both levels of learning at BMS:

For elementary students, the school year will wrap-up on **May 15th** - taking into consideration the limited stamina and unique developmental needs of our young learners.

For secondary students, the school year will conclude on **May 22nd** - allowing for some extended learning opportunities for our older learners and time to submit/re-submit any outstanding/low score work under the guidance and flexible parameters of individual teachers.

Early this week, I shared these dates with faculty and staff and also discussed adaptive/adjusted grading measures through the end of the school year - up to and beyond the two time frames noted above. Essentially, every score ranging from 0 to 60s will be changed to a standard 65% to allow students at BOTH levels a reasonable opportunity for grade recovery. Our established distance learning approach was intended to be a way for students to experience a level of continued, consistent (yet obviously very different) education while honoring family financial investments. Considering a variety of shared non-ideal circumstances as well as unique student needs and learning differences, I do not want any of our students to experience failure. Realistically, regardless of limitations that we regularly worked with families to remedy and adapt to with troubleshooting, provided devices, different assignment formats, extended due dates, etc., all students had the chance to be engaged in continued learning during this time. While holding students reasonably accountable for their efforts, we want to remain flexible and responsive to needs.

Following the two end dates, students at the elementary and secondary level, with guidance from and communication with individual teachers, are encouraged to take a look at missed and/or challenging assignments - getting additional help from our faculty, re-working/re-submitting work, and ultimately improving grades. The time following the end dates is ONLY intended to bring any low grades UP as desired; grades will not be brought down at that point. Work that comes in during this specified time that could bring a grade down will not be counted.

Teachers have been working diligently each day to plan and coordinate various instructional approaches for our students while maintenance personnel worked hard to deep clean both buildings and the office administrative team provided support to both families and teachers behind the scenes daily from day one. This exhaustive collaborative effort has been for the good of our students and a way to honor tuition investments. Returned support, trust, and encouragement from our patron families and the board has been overwhelming and greatly appreciated as we navigated murky waters while trusting God and pressing forward with one another.

I greatly appreciate those who helped make our initial full-day work drop-off/pick-up day safe and successful! We had the opportunity to relay materials, support families, see some of our students from a distance (who have been greatly missed by all), and have our kitchen staff organize a fun family pizza kit service in the meantime! Since that time, further stay-at-home orders were imposed across the state, and I encouraged teachers to plan individual exchanges of materials outside of our buildings as needed and as folks felt comfortable.

We have had to cancel/reschedule many special events during this trying season - one of them being the annual school auction (now rescheduled for September 4 and 5). Investments in necessary programs, assistive technology, and planning for next year while supporting our dedicated teachers through all of this has brought our financial state down to the wire with an already limited budget. As such, any tuition reimbursements would be extremely minimal and would set us back even further moving forward - this will not be a viable option. We appreciate your ongoing support of and contribution to our efforts for the good of all through an uncertain season.

Regarding dates and events, please know that a main priority of mine is to have a graduation ceremony of some sort take place when we see stay-at-home restrictions and group gathering guidelines lifted. This may be sometime in June, and we are not sure how it will look or exactly when it will happen, but I personally promise our seniors that they will be recognized for their efforts after things start to come back to a safer, more stable state.

I sincerely thank everyone for their unique part in all of this. I am more than proud of our collective efforts to view a problem as an *opportunity!* Please continue to do your best as we move forward and look to the end of the school year together, and maintain those great lines of communication with teachers and administration - we are here to help and serve you to the best of our ability during this time!

Hang in there, stay safe, and know that you are appreciated.

Yours In Christ,

**Nicholas J. Wilson**  
**Superintendent**  
**Secondary Principal**  
**Belleville Mennonite School**