

Superintendent Salim

Script: Video Message to CPS

FINAL 4-18-20 8AM

Hello, I'm Kenny Salim, Superintendent of the Cambridge Public Schools.

During these challenging times, I appreciate the opportunity to speak to our CPS community. As we continue to navigate these incredibly complex circumstances, I hope each of you is staying safe, healthy, and resilient.

Our hearts go out to those who have been directly impacted by COVID-19, especially those recovering from illness, caring for a sick relative, or grieving the loss of a loved one.

We are ALL incredibly grateful to the health care workers who continue to do their difficult jobs every single day.

We applaud our public safety officers, health officials, and those who work for grocery stores, delivery services, and countless other roles that we are depending on.

Today, I want to extend a special thank you to our REMARKABLE STAFF.

Thank you for the dedication, resilience, and creativity that you are demonstrating during this emergency closure.

Thanks to the work of the entire team, we're changing the way we do business – bringing our most important RESOURCES and SERVICES to families and the community.

We're calling it "CPS @ Home" and I'd like to tell you about some of our efforts.

When we closed schools on March 13th, our first priority was to ensure that EVERY child still had access to school breakfast and lunch. In partnership with the City of Cambridge and local nonprofits, we launched the Meals Program. We established eight sites across the city, where we provide nutritious breakfast and lunch bags, five days a week, to anyone who needs them -- and in just the first five weeks, we distributed more than TWENTY THOUSAND meals.

In addition, our partners at “Food For Free” are providing home delivery of meals, and groceries to families in need.

THANK YOU to the food service workers, bus drivers, community volunteers, and others who are working SAFELY and TIRELESSLY to keep our students fed.

THANK YOU to our CUSTODIANS, who have been working hard to clean and disinfect our school buildings for everyone’s health and safety.

THANK YOU to our CENTRAL OFFICE team who continue to perform their regular duties – and so many, many, new responsibilities – to keep CPS moving forward.

THANK YOU to our OUT OF SCHOOL TIME PARTNERS who continue to engage and support our students and families in myriad ways.

And THANK YOU to our SCHOOL COMMITTEE for providing leadership during this difficult time.

Additionally, during this closure, we are making sure EVERY home has the technology needed to engage students in online learning.

While our high school students were already bringing home Chromebooks as part of the 1:1 initiative, we’ve offered Chromebooks to all 2,700 students in grades 3 to 8 and families identified as needing devices in grades JK-2.

Within 24 hours of the closure announcement, nearly 2,400 students took home Chromebooks with them on March 13. Since then, staff and volunteers have hand delivered almost 500 additional chromebooks and almost 300 wifi devices for families that need them – in some cases, to students who are temporarily staying in other cities and towns, and in homeless shelters. We’re grateful for our corporate partners that have helped us bridge the digital divide.

Of course, the most ambitious and complex component of “CPS @ Home” is to reinvent our approach to TEACHING and LEARNING.

Even though our libraries, science labs, art studios, and schoolyards are closed, we are NO LESS DETERMINED to create a broad range of engagement and learning experiences for our students.

That commitment extends from pre-K through high school, from students in general education to students with disabilities and English Learners.

Last week, we presented our Distance Learning and Support Plan, designed to maintain connections between educators and students – to engage EVERY student in meaningful ways, with an explicit focus on each student’s wellbeing.

The plan calls for a variety of learning experiences – both on-line and off-line. Some activities are led by educators, some by parents, others by students themselves. It aims to create some consistency across the district, while also giving schools and teachers the flexibility to CUSTOMIZE their work to meet the needs of the students they serve.

THANK YOU to our educators and to our school leaders for working hard to make this massive transition.

“CPS @ Home” is about making sure that EVERY student and EVERY family gets the supports they need to stay safe, healthy, and engaged in learning.

But we also recognize that each student is different, has different needs, and some require more support to get through these unprecedented times. So we’re working extra hard to identify and address the needs of families with the greatest needs.

Distance learning is only possible because of our MOST IMPORTANT PARTNERS – parents and caregivers.

So to all the parents and other adults supporting our students at home, we say a huge THANK YOU. As a parent of two young children, I know first-hand the enormous challenges and pressures this presents – especially for caregivers who are adapting to working from home themselves with their children and supporting their own parents from afar.

Thank you for your PATIENCE and for your DETERMINATION to make this work.

To our STUDENTS, let me say from the bottom of my heart: We are PROUD of you.

Although we may not see you every day in school, we are here for you.

Let's face it: Distance Learning isn't easy. It's new to all of us. There are definitely some growing pains, but we're learning and getting better at it every day and are looking to innovate and try new things.

Teachers are making it work by leading virtual classroom lessons and small group sessions, holding office hours, and staying in touch by video, email, and phone.

The CPS website contains many digital learning tools and resources, with interactive online programs in every subject area, for every grade level.

We've also shared lots of creative ideas to keep students engaged OFF-line as well.

All we can ask – of our educators, parents, and most of all, our STUDENTS – is to DO YOUR BEST.

Continue to make physical, emotional, and mental health a top priority. Make choices that work for you and your family.

Please stay updated with CPS by visiting the “CPS @ Home” pages on our website – “CPSD.us/athome.”

There you'll find lots of useful information – including details about meal sites, social-emotional supports, and online learning tools. The site also contains some Frequently Asked Questions, and if you have a question that's not answered on the website, you can email it to cps@cpsd.us.

On our website, you can learn more about the **Mayor's COVID-19 Disaster Relief Fund**. Mayor Siddiqui and City Manager DePasquale established the fund to provide emergency assistance to Cambridge residents who need extra support. If your family needs assistance, you can apply for funds online at cambridgeMA.gov. If you're able to donate, I also encourage you to do so.

I also encourage you to follow us on social media! Every day on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, we're posting ideas for families to engage in learning at home, as well as links to community resources.

Thank you for taking the time to watch this message.

Keep washing those hands! Stay home. Stay healthy.

Thank you and be well.