Dear BPS Community:

Yesterday, Governor Andrew Cuomo extended COVID-19 school closure to May 15th. As we enter this second month of uncharted waters in education—with remote instruction, grab and go food service, and facilitation of childcare for our parents who are essential health care workers—I am amazed, but not surprised, by the level of outreach and continuity of responsibility to our students from Cabinet Members, Principals, and Teachers.

Today, on a conference call with an Investigative Post reporter, Principal of Olmsted #156 Dr. Michael Gruber said his teachers switched to online instruction without a moment’s hesitation. Dr. Gruber’s comment was backed up by Research Lab #366 principal Angela Cullen, and B.U.I.L.D. Community School #92 Principal Tanika Shedrick. Makowski #99 Principal Dawn DiNatali said Makowski’s PK – 4 teaching force have likewise carried out their duties out of sheer devotion to their students. They also provide wellness check-ins that might involve calling a parent just to say hello and hear their students’ voices. Principal DiNatali said, “The buildings are closed. School is in session.”

As we wrap our arms around remote instruction and help parents to do the same, we are also highly aware that when students are well socially, emotionally, and mentally—they learn better! There is a need to lift and amplify the wonderful work that our community has done in stepping up to assist with meal delivery, instructional materials, and wellness tools to our BPS families. School Partners and Community Based Organizations are providing mental health supports to students using innovative virtual methods. Our Supplemental Health Care Partners have shifted and re-focused their work to now provide medical prevention measures to staff to help mitigate any possibility of exposure or spread of the COVID-19 virus.

Student Support Department Leads have been working to: ensure: (1) equity for all students—working with schools to ensure that students serving on a suspension receive the same level of
support as their non-suspended peers; (2) quality in mental health services continue with students who were connected with mental health providers; and (3) opportunities for parent engagement continue... one example is the creation (which will launch next Thursday 4/29) of a virtual way to provide parents with training through a virtual parent center forum.

All Buffalo Public Schools are closed until **May 15th** due to the Coronavirus pandemic.

Please check back often for updates.

Principals continue to work closely with teachers and families to keep students connected during this global health crisis. Principals are making the necessary shift from leaders in a brick and mortar learning institution to leaders of virtual instruction for hundreds of families and children. Compassion, continuity and communication are key when establishing a virtual instructional atmosphere in light of a global pandemic. Specific and targeted plans must be developed for every student in need of support. Principals continue to hold regularly scheduled virtual grade level and faculty meetings. Additionally, principals and teachers host virtual meetings with students and families. Insisting that staff reach out to every student and family every day using a plethora of communication strategies is key as we build our data base for this important part of our work.

Research Lab #366 brought lawn signs to all of their senior’s homes today so passers-by will know that a proud Raptor lives here!
High School principals have also been working with their teams to determine the specific and unique supports needed for those students who showed signs of academic struggle in the previous marking periods. The goal for principals is to help as many students as possible be successful in passing Regents courses. We are also shifting our instructional model to prepare students for Advanced Placement (AP) exams coming up in May. Connecting with all students is proving to be the most important component in our BPS Learning from Home initiative.

Distribution of devices for grades 3-8 (14,251 devices in total) began on April 14. As of today, nearly 5,500 of those devices have been picked up! Principals have been sending their own heartfelt letters of gratitude to our various teams during this time of school closure. (See attached example.)

If you are looking for something to add to your home learning schedule, please join us for our 3rd Virtual Saturday Academy, “Better Together” on Saturday, April 18th from 10:00 am – 12:30 pm. There promises to be something for everyone! Pre-register on Eventbrite at https://bps-cs-saturdayacademy.eventbrite.com.

Be well & be safe,

Dr. Kriner Cash
Superintendent