

Dear Students, Parents, and or Guardians;

The purpose of this correspondence is to provide you with several pieces of information.

***Special Called Board Meeting***

1. The CISD Board will have a Special Called Board Meeting on March 26, 2020 at 7:00 PM to discuss the following:
  - a. Discuss and or approve class rank procedures for the 2019-2020 school year.
  - b. Discuss and or approve class rank procedures for the 2020-2021, 2021-2022, and 2022-2023 school years.
  - c. Discuss and or approve CISD grading procedures for the duration of school closure related to COVID 19.
  - d. Discuss and or approve the optimal amount of time students should spend each week working on assignments while they are at home during COVID 19 related closure.
  - e. Discuss and or approve purchasing laptops for both secondary and elementary students.
  - f. Discuss and or approve whether or not Cushing ISD students will return to school on April 6, 2020.

***Let's discuss these agenda items:***

***Class rank for 2019-2020*** – As you know, many schools have closed multiple weeks due to COVID 19. Furthermore, all schools in Texas will remain closed until April 3, 2020, perhaps longer. Because of extended school closure, many schools are re-evaluating their class rank procedures. The CISD Board has been proactive with their decisions involving COVID 19 and has requested that CISD administration research the matter of how to rank our students for the current year as well as the next three years (as all HS students through 2023 are impacted to a degree).

The Texas Education Agency (TEA) has given little guidance on the matter and it is doubtful that they will take a definitive stance on class rank because it is a local policy (EIC Local). In short, our EIC Local policy currently states that seniors will be ranked based on certain HS courses taken through the fifth (5<sup>th</sup>) six-weeks of their senior year.

Because of the seriousness of the matter, we contacted our school attorney to discuss how to handle class rank. Our school attorney recommended that our Board of Trustees meet to waive the EIC Local policy for the current school year and to rank our students through the 4<sup>th</sup> six weeks verses the 5<sup>th</sup> six weeks.

As it currently stands, we will likely suggest using grades through the fourth six-weeks for class rank purposes for the graduating class of 2019-2020. For your peace of mind, we will continue to research the matter by seeing what other schools in Texas plan to do with their policy and we will seek additional guidance from TEA prior to our special called Board meeting so that we can give the best recommendation. We will certainly inform you once a formal decision has been made and I fully expect the decision to be made on Thursday, March 23, 2020.

***Class rank for 2020-2021, 2021-2022, and 2022-2023*** – The CISD Board has also asked us to research what we will do with our freshman, sophomores, and juniors with regards to class rank. Determining class rank for that group presents more of a challenge because we do not know if we will be back to school. Meaning, we may come back to school for the last six-weeks giving us an additional complete grading cycle. That said, we will likely “table” class rank procedures for students expecting to graduate during the 2021, 2022, and 2023 school years until later in the year after we see what happens. If we do not come back to school for a complete grading cycle and TEA does not tell us to do otherwise, we will likely recommend using the first four six-week grades for the 2019-2020 school year regardless of the year they graduate. Truly, I want you to have some peace about class rank if your child graduates in year 2021, 2022, and or 2023. We are taking those years serious, but we have a bit more time to make the best decision with that particular group.

**Grading procedures during school closure** – Texas schools across the state have differing opinions on how to handle grades during this time. Likely, if you are reading this document, you have an opinion as well. Ultimately, the Board will discuss the pros and cons we present on how to best handle grades during our time of closure. TEA has stated that “schools are not to lower expectations for our students”. At Cushing, we will try to adhere to that mandate but there is going to be some growing pains in doing so. My personal opinion, that may or may not come to fruition, is that our students should be required to turn in the work so that our teachers can check for mastery. Another personal opinion is that we grade the work with high grades if they complete the work and turn it in. That is for two reasons. 1) If a student turns in the work, the teacher can get a feel for whether or not the students understand the work. If the students do not perform well, then the teacher can focus on that particular assignment again. I do not think it is fair to give a grade to a student as if they were in typical school because some kids have parents at home that can really help and others do not. 2) That said, one day, students will likely go to college. To be frank, I would rather the students have a very high grade for this time when they are out of school based on the extreme pivot we have all been encouraged or mandated to make, verses a “P” for pass or a “blank” for no grade at all. Everyone knows what a 100 is, but not everyone can interpret a P or a blank. Again, those are personal opinions and TEA could give further guidance that changes those opinions between now and Thursday night.

***What is the optimal amount of work that students should receive each week?*** Again, this is another opinion item. We will discuss the pros and cons of how much work the students should receive. I realize you have not asked for my personal opinion, but I feel it is necessary for you to know where I stand. My thoughts are that we need to provide you with enough work for your kids to grow. Many kids want to reach deeper and I feel that we should be able to provide you with resources to push them if you so choose. However, I also believe that we need to limit the amount of work we expect to be returned. Meaning, I believe your kids should focus the majority of their time on core classes and that we should limit what we expect to receive back (to get the high grade). That way, our kids that take longer to finish certain items can really focus on the details of what we prescribe, but the ones that complete the work faster can have more to build upon if needed. If we are talking timewise, I would limit core classes to two hours per day. And, I feel that we should allow you the ability to highly modify elective classes. That is based on what I do with my own daughter. She is still learning and she really gets to focus on things she likes to do too, like science, reading, and piano. So, when we talk plans we are making them long term because there is a good chance that our students will not come back for the next couple of months. For that reason, we have to plan that way. Maybe some of our teachers have given too much work at this time. Even still, I am very proud of our teachers for getting things together so fast and passionately. I have heard from many of you that you are proud of them as well. But, I do believe it is worth the conversation to determine what the school believes to be the optimal time to work each week.

***Potential laptop purchase*** – Before you get excited that your child will be holding a new laptop next week, understand that we are still weeks away from implementation once the Board gives the green light. The laptops would have to be purchased, sent to us by the vendor, and configured by our tech department, then released to the students. CISD has been building our infrastructure to do some wonderful things with technology over the past several years. Our technology staff has been very forward in their thinking over the past decade and we are much more advanced technologically than people realize. We certainly have some of the best technology in the area. I do believe that our students will soon be assigned a computer for use at home and at school (whether that is now or next year). That was in the works long before COVID 19. However, COVID 19 has thrust us into a position to consider acting now verses later. The Board has strongly encouraged this path, so I anticipate them being very receptive to the idea to act soon. But, I also know that the Board is realistic and understands the importance of measuring twice and cutting once. This week, our task is to reach out to vendors and see what their availability is and what the expected timeline of delivery would be if we purchased them now.

**Will we return April 6, 2020?** That is the million dollar question. The start date depends on several things, mostly from guidance from the CDC, TEA, Nacogdoches County, and the Governor. The Board made a decision to meet on the COVID 19 matter every Thursday so that they stay informed of the situation. Even though it is an action item, the Board may choose to take no action and await guidance from the state with regards to the start date. We wanted to put the item on the agenda to give you much time to make plans, etc. if we knew we would close.

### ***Other matters of importance***

***Staff working from home*** - Cushing ISD has taken actions for the majority of our staff to work from home, whether by choice or mandate. We have virtualized most computers to a point where teachers can even print from home to the school without stepping on campus. The teachers' computers will go thru further configurations in the days to come as we tweak our system. Today, we piloted Microsoft Teams Meeting as a group platform to meet remotely at 9:00 AM with our special education staff, then at 10:00 AM and 1:00 PM with our elementary and secondary staff respectively. We had ARD meetings using that Microsoft Teams meeting as well. Tomorrow, the elementary and secondary schools will have another meeting to discuss some lingering issues. As a result of those meetings, we have asked for the principals to post questions that they have (or receive) so that we can answer to a broad audience.

***Fellowship of Christian Athletes*** – Because many of the churches were closed yesterday, we posted a message to the JH and HS FCA members. It is on the front page of the CISD website. If you child is an FCA member and did not get the message, encourage them to read it a bit of challenge and uplift during this time.

***Trees for Sale*** – On Wednesday @ 10:00 AM, we are going to sell some trees we planned on having the students (and volunteers plant this past week). Unfortunately, we do not have the manpower to plant them all at this time. The majority of the trees are Dogwoods about 3 ft. long (seedlings). We will sale them for \$1.00 a piece or \$60.00 for 100. The ones that we do not sale, we will be planting on the schools tree farm. That said, pull up to the HS cafeteria and remain in your car with exact change in hand if you want to purchase a dogwood. We will be having a drive thru until 11:30 AM or until we are sold out. The trees would need to be planted soon.

***Board meeting*** – the school board meeting will be handled virtually this month. We will be using Microsoft Teams Meeting for each board member to call in for the meeting. It will be our first meeting of that nature, so there will likely be kinks. We will post call in instructions for those of you that wish to listen to the meeting on the website. However, please know that we will inform you of all decisions via district newsletter and or k12 alert on Friday, March 24, 2020.

***What to do if you have questions or concerns*** – If you have questions for a teacher, obviously feel free to contact them. If you need further specific assistance or just have a concern in general, contact your child's principal. At this time, we request contacts be made through email and they will return a call to you. The principals contact emails are:

- High school – Andy Gresham – [agresham@cushingisd.org](mailto:agresham@cushingisd.org)
- Junior High – Shane Smelley – [ssmelley@cushingisd.org](mailto:ssmelley@cushingisd.org)
- Elementary – Stefani Jackson – [sjackson@cushingisd.org](mailto:sjackson@cushingisd.org)

As always, feel free to contact me as well – [mdavis@cushingisd.org](mailto:mdavis@cushingisd.org)

Once we receive your questions, we will try to answer your questions to a broad audience.

### ***Conclusion***

Everyone, we certainly want to be a support to you during this time. Please be sure and communicate your concerns!

Also, please forgive our shortcomings as we wade through these murky waters... msd