

MS 447 FAQs for REMOTE LEARNING MAY 2020

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ACADEMICS, GRADING, and ENRICHMENT

Q: My child's school day seems significantly shorter now and they finish school quickly. Are there any plans to increase online activities or assignments?

Little by little, teachers are adding in additional layers to assignments, or enrichment opportunities, so that students who are able to engage for more time can take on greater challenge. We have compiled a [list of additional resources](#) that your child can access to enrich their academic work from 447. This list has been curated by MS 447 teachers, and is a live document that will be updated as we discover new resources. It is organized by subject. Additionally, the NYC Department of Education has provided some [grade-level assignments in core subjects](#).

Q: My child is feeling less challenged by the work. Has there been a shift in expectations during this time?

Our expectations remain high, while recognizing that students in our school have a range of capacity to engage in online assignments and interactions. For starters, we want to make sure all 447 kids can "enter" online school; from there, teachers are working hard to develop lessons/assignments to accommodate many different levels of engagement. It is also useful for your child (or you) to let your teachers know that they are feeling under-challenged, so the teacher can provide some additional challenges.

Q: How much time should my child spend on their schoolwork daily?

There is not a specific amount of time that a student should spend on schoolwork each day. Because every student has a different circumstance related to when and how they can complete schoolwork, it really varies how much a student spends on work. We have set due dates to always be at 9:00 p.m. so that students don't feel obligated stay up late doing schoolwork. It is also okay to make the decision that your child has spent enough time on schoolwork for the day

and needs to be able to unplug and unwind, or spend time with family. This is one of the reasons we are applying leniency to due dates during this time. It is also useful for your child (or you) to let your teachers know that they are feeling they need *more* challenge, so the teacher can work provide some additional assignments.

Q: We need books! How can my student access books to borrow and read?

Our ELA teachers are currently administering a survey to their students, asking about their book needs, and their interest in participating in a book club. We will try to provide books to students to cannot purchase or access books at this time. Also, use [this resource](#) on our website for ways to access books, including some free options.

Q: Are there opportunities for artistic engagement (visual arts, music, dance, theater, etc.) within or outside of the MS 447 community?

Students looking for all different arts activities should check out [this list](#) of wonderful places to visit online, compiled by our 447 Arts department. Also, all MS 447 students have been invited to the LeAp Classroom (Class Code x3p2pau) and can begin the weekly challenges, which are described [here](#).

Q: My child needs individual help from teachers but finds it hard to ask for help. Any thoughts on how he can go about this?

Middle school is a great time for kids to start feeling more comfortable with self-advocacy, but it's also OK for you to help your child if they're struggling. You can start by emailing the teacher for them, and copying your child on the email. Or, you and your child could draft the email together through their email, and you could both sign it. Students often learn by seeing your advocacy in action and start to feel more comfortable taking on that role themselves. And teachers have time every day when they can "meet," email, or phone call with their students to provide extra help, clarity, moral support, etc. So asking the teacher for some time for that is very appropriate. Since your teacher can't see your child every day in class, it is so important for you and your child to communicate if something's wrong.

Q: My child is feeling overwhelmed academically. How can I support them? Are there any resources available to students struggling with executive functioning issues related to distance learning?

Grade teams have made tailored plans for students that are particularly struggling with executive functioning in remote school. These plans are individually developed in partnership with the student, parent, teachers, and counselors. Please reach out to your child's counselor if you feel that they are really struggling across classes to keep their head above water, and we can problem solve collaboratively with you.

Q: I worry that my child has limited contact with teachers and peers. Are there any plans to increase the amount of live and interactive instruction?

We know that real time (synchronous) interactions between students and teachers, and among students, is so important for many children to feel engaged in distance learning. Teachers are continuing to learn ways to use available tools to create effective interactive instruction, and our

learning curve is steep and varied. Many staff members also have similar constraints that our students/families have, including caring for young children, limited access to devices and internet connectivity, illness and loss, and concerns about privacy. In many ways, this is a time of experimentation for teachers, and teachers have adjusted their lesson delivery and added in live instruction to the extent they are able, and when they find it beneficial for academic and social engagement. However, 447 online school is still a work in progress!

Q: My kid misses collaborating with other students, yet they won't initiate group work on their own. Any suggestions to help them get this going?

Similar to the ways that teachers are developing capacity to have live interactions with their students, they are working towards building in more opportunities for group collaboration among students. As teachers' and students' familiarity with online tools grows, they are able to fold in more collaborative tasks. Students are also encouraged/welcome to "get together" on their own to do work together if they are willing to initiate it themselves.

Q: How and when are parents alerted if a student is missing classwork?

As in physical school, we expect teachers to contact families if they see a persistent problem with a child's work or participation. However, we are approaching assignments and time frames with leniency in our distance learning, to accommodate student/family needs at home. Teachers are also doing more direct outreach to their students when they notice a pattern of absence or missing work. We are also working to keep PupilPath up-to-date so that parents and kids can monitor their work.

Q: Are there resources for extra academic help for my child, or resources that can help me help my child academically in remote school?

Yes! [Here is a list](#) of available resources for extra academic help during remote learning. Also, District 15 has set up a [Dial-a-Teacher](#) program that is designed for parents who need support in helping their kids with schoolwork. Dial-a-Teacher connects you with a District 15 teacher to work through your questions, and multi-lingual interpretation is available. [Here](#) is a flier and a [schedule](#). Middle school help schedules can be found on the second tab at the bottom of that page.

Q: How is student progress being measured?

Just like in physical school, teachers in remote school monitor progress on a regular basis through the assignments they submit. Currently, we have fewer opportunities for formal assessment (tests/quizzes), and are preparing to administer some year-end formative assessments in ELA and Math, so we can enter the next school year with a strong knowledge of where our students are academically. This will help guide us in curricular decisions and help us support all students.

Q: How can we be assured that kids will be where they're supposed to be academically at the end of the year?

While we continually maintain focus on making sure kids have the access they need, are "present," engaged, and supported, we also know that we have an important job of furthering our

students' academic learning. Distance learning feels and looks very different from physical school and, like you, teachers are concerned about the barriers to academic progress. They have worked hard to identify the most important curricular skills and concepts for their students to learn and practice during this time. By staying in close touch with students, teachers are also keeping track of progress, so we know where to pick up when physical school resumes, and so we can fill in gaps. It is important to remember that children are quite resilient, given ongoing support from school and home. And, if you have specific concerns about your child's learning in a particular subject, please reach out to our teachers.

Q: How are IEPs and IEP meetings being handled? What is the process if my child needs additional services?

Please refer to [this page](#) on our website that outlines supports and procedures for students with IEPs during remote learning, including questions about IEP meetings, academic supports and modifications, and related services. Contact your child's case manager or Jessica Saunders (jrsaunders@ms447.org) with questions relating to IEPs and special education services.

Q: How will the new grading policy work?

The NYC Department of Education released a [grading policy](#) for all schools to follow during remote learning this spring. For middle school students, the final grade (what ordinarily would have been an average of our three marking periods) for each subject will either be MT (meets requirements), N (needs improvement), or NX (incomplete course). MT and N are considered passing grades. NX means that the student will be provided additional opportunities this summer or in the fall to complete the requirements of the course. While the policy does raise many questions, it is designed primarily to recognize the inequities of access to technology and other learning supports in remote learning.

Q: How will grades in the new grading system be used?

For MS 447, grades will only be used to assess starting points for our curriculum next year. Final grades this year, for all grades, can only be used to determine promotion to the next grade when looked at holistically for the whole year. Remember that we did have our students at school for a full two-thirds of the year, so that information is as important to us--or more important--than this final trimester, in terms of knowing your child as a student. We do not yet know how this year's grades for 7th graders will impact the high school admissions process. This will be a policy made by the NYC DOE.

Q: How can we keep our children motivated to work and learn within the new grading system?

While we know that grades are an important motivator for some students, we also can take this opportunity to help students feel connected and invested, even without traditional grades. Because of the barriers that many students face in remote learning, we believe that a broader grading system is an important way to prevent penalizing students who are not able to fully connect, for a lot of reasons, during online learning.

Q: Will there be a virtual parent-teacher conference before the end of the year?

Yes. Similar to our virtual conferences in March, teachers will invite students/parents to schedule a modified Student Led Conference (SLC) starting on May 18, through the end of May. Your SLC teacher will provide some reflective prompts for your child to think about before the conference. The conference will focus largely on the challenges and successes of remote learning. These conferences are not required. If you Choose to have an SLC, your child will need to be part of that meeting. Apart from this SLC, you may always reach out to individual teachers if you'd like to speak with them.

SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL and PHYSICAL HEALTH

Q: I'm concerned about all the screen time. What opportunities are there to participate in screen-free projects and activities?

As we become more comfortable with developing curriculum for an online platform, we are also thinking about ways for students to engage in the material off-screen. If possible, some families also find it helpful to create a loose schedule that builds in off-screen time, exercise time, etc., though we know that can be quite difficult to enforce with adolescents! I encourage you to look into the LeAp offerings, which are fun and include some off-screen opportunities. The arts team has also put together [this list](#) of sites for fun activities in visual arts, drama, music, and dance. Finally, you may find an interesting class in at [The Home School Coop](#), which offers free synchronous, fun classes for people of all ages, and includes activities off-screen.

Q: Is it possible for teachers to include assigned videos without linking to YouTube?

We know it can be difficult to monitor online activity when your child is in online all day for school, and the internet can be a rabbit hole of distractions (and questionable content). However, unless teachers download the video using additional software, which can't be done on many devices, videos (from YouTube) will always link back to YouTube. Also, downloading videos from YouTube violates copyright laws, except under certain circumstances.

Q: What are some resources that promote physical activity while remaining socially distant?

We suggest starting at [this list of resources](#) that the NYC Department of Education put together to help families and kids engage in physical activity during this time. New York Road Runners also has [this resource](#) to help young people exercise at home. And [here](#) are some suggestions from Mr. Geneen for places on the internet that can keep you active and having fun.

Q: Are there opportunities for middle schoolers to physically connect while maintaining safe social distancing?

At this time, please follow state and local guidelines for social distancing, which ask us to refrain from physical interactions that aren't essential (such as grocery shopping). We know this is so difficult for everyone, and especially adolescents.

Q: What are some opportunities for middle schoolers to socially interact with their peers, make new friends, and stay socially connected? Sometimes it seems that my child is sitting by themselves all day long at a computer, and I'd love them to connect with their peers.

We hope that advisory can be a starting point for students to meet with peers in a somewhat structured "school" environment. Teachers are also, little by little, increasing structures within their classes that facilitate peer interactions and collaborative work time. We encourage students to participate in all live classes as it is another opportunity to interact with their classmates. MS 447 is also still hosting some of our clubs such as Wolf Press, GSA, Student Government, Green Team, and LeAp virtual after school. Encourage your child to drop in on one of the (supervised) lunch hangouts for their grade. Each child received an invitation to the lunch classroom for their grade on Google Classroom. Outside of school time, kids can set up weekly watch parties (through apps like [Netflix Party](#)), play games together (try [Houseparty](#)), or have a regular Google Meet Hangout with a friend or group of friends—the closest thing to just hanging out in a room or coffee shop with friends.

Q: My child does not necessarily like group work and interacting with his peers, but I believe it is important part of his social growth. How can I encourage my child to interact with his peers, outside of SDI and Advisory, regularly?

The answer to the question above also applies to this question. Try to help your child find fun, lower stakes ways to engage with schoolmates around a common interest—online games, movies, etc. Also encourage your child to attend any live sessions in their classes.

Q: What resources are available for my middle schooler who is experiencing anxiety or depression?

Start by connecting your child to their grade counselor. The counselors are available to meet with students individually or in small groups. This can be the first step in assessing what your child needs. After meeting with the counselor, we can discuss what other supports (if any) your child may need. If you think your child is in immediate physical danger, please call 911 or bring them to an emergency room. [Here](#) is a great article for parents to read, which addresses strategies for supporting your child who is experiencing anxiety. Please be sure to take a look at [this newsletter](#) that our counselors put out at the end of March. It is filled with great information for taking care of yourself and others, managing stress and anxiety, and where to go for more help.

Q: How can my child connect with a school counselor?

Parents or students can email their grade counselor at any time and they will set up a time to meet with your child. 6th graders contact Lisa Bell (lbell@ms447.org); 7th graders contact Stacey Billups (sbillups@ms447.org); 8th graders contact Star Corvinelli (scorvinelli@ms447.org).

Q: What is the most appropriate way for students to reach out to teachers/staff for social-emotional support?

Email them! Our teachers are all very empathetic to our kids, and many of them are happy to get on a call or help students connect with available resources. Students (or you) can also contact their grade counselors for social-emotional support.

Q: What and where are the best resources for those dealing with Covid-19 related loss?

If you or your family needs emotional support to deal with COVID-19 related loss, start with [NYC Well](#) to help you access services and resource. [This one-page document](#) provides tips for caretakers helping children deal with traumatic loss. [This guide](#) provides information about how children grieve and how parents can help. [The Coalition to Support Grieving Students](#) has many online support resources.

HELP FOR PARENTS AND FAMILIES

Q: What resources are available to parents to support us as we work to encourage academic engagement and socialization of our middle schoolers?

For starters, remember you are in good company: Although every family/child presents its unique challenges, this is an extraordinary situation and has tested us all in unimaginable ways. [This article](#) from Time.com highlights the particular challenges for middle school students—and their parents—during this time. We also encourage parents to seek support for your own emotional/mental health needs. [NYC Well](#) is a great starting point for accessing mental health services. We have also learned of [this opportunity](#) for free therapy services through a Columbia University study.

During this time, families may find it helpful to ease up on their screen restrictions, as digital communication is the main way for kids to be able to interact with their peers, and this is so important for adolescents. While it is still important for kids to have off-screen time and physical activity each day, the balance might be different than in normal times. Thinking carefully about which “battles you pick” with your child can help ease difficult dynamics between you and your child. It is very hard for all of us to be on our best behavior right now.

Q: What opportunities are there for parent connection and interaction?

Please attend our virtual PTA meetings, as well as future meetings that Arin will hold with parents. Stay tuned for LeAp’s family engagement workshop, a live session featuring yoga or free movement (like Zumba!). We also encourage you to join the 447 parent online groups, [here](#).

Q: What supports are there, if any, for families dealing with financial strains, now or in the future?

In the immediate, PTA may be able to offer a small amount of financial support through money raised by their GoFundMe. Funds collected here are shared directly with families in need. Please contact Amy Sirot (asirot@ms447.org) to request help. In the longer term, once school reopens, MS 447 and its PTA place high priority in providing access for all students to our rich academic opportunities, technology and other supplies for school, and enrichment opportunities. The PTA also set up The Clothing Exchange, a free resource for students who need access to seasonal clothing and shoes. All items are clean and new or gently used.

Q: How can families with sufficient resources continue to support families within our school community who are facing health challenges and/or financial challenges?

We will keep our [PTA GoFundMe](#) open as needed. Funds collected here are shared directly with families in need. And you can also [donate directly to the PTA](#). Our PTA's fundraising this year was cut short, and they will not be able to get revenue from the annual auction. Everything you donate to PTA will help allow continuation of programs like Exploration, Arts, student scholarships for trips, and more.

HIGH SCHOOL ADMISSIONS and REGENTS EXAMS

Q: How will this remote learning period impact high school admissions? What will high school admissions look like next year since standard measures for high school admission are missing or different?

We do not yet know how high school admissions process will change as a result of the remote learning grading policy. The NYC Department of Education is currently undertaking a broad engagement process to develop policies for school admissions, particularly as it relates to this year's 7th graders. It is important to remember that all NYC public school students are in the same extraordinary situation of having to learn from home. We will update you as DOE develops admissions policies.

Q: Will the Specialized High School Assessment Test (SHSAT) still be offered and used for admission, and how can we prepare for it?

At this time, the Specialized High School Assessment Test (SHSAT) will still be administered for interested 8th graders in October and used for admission into the city's eight specialized high schools. MS 447 does not offer specific preparation for this exam, but many families seek outside tutoring or prep courses. More information on the specialized high schools can be found [here](#). Information about DREAM-SHSI, NYC's free SHSAT prep program for students who meet income and academic eligibility guidelines, can be found [here](#).

Q: What is the status of the Regents exams?

New York State canceled all Regents exams for June and August 2020. MS 447 8th graders who pass the Algebra 1 and Living Environment courses will be exempted from taking those two exams and will be granted Regents credit towards the Regents diploma. Additionally, the lab requirement for the Living Environment course has been waived.

TRIP REFUNDS

Q: What is the status of refunds for the overnight trips?

7th grade Pocono Environmental Education Center (PEEC) trip: We have been in contact with PEEC and are expecting full refund from them when they reopen. We are also working to find a

resolution with the bus company, which is currently closed as well. We will contact you when we have information on your refund options.

8th grade Washington, D.C. trip: We received a refund from our travel agency this week of some, but not all, of our payment for the trip. We will be reaching out to families shortly regarding options for refunds of payments made.

Q: We still have money from the last candy box my child received. Where should we send this money?

If you have outstanding money from candy boxes, \$30 for each box you have not returned will be deducted from your refund, if applicable.

8th GRADE STUFF

Q: Will there be an 8th grade graduation? How can 8th grade students celebrate their 447 experience without returning to school?

We feel special sadness for our 8th graders, and so we are planning several seniors-only events for them. Senior Week will be held during the last week of school, culminating on June 25 with a virtual Moving Up/Graduation event. In the meantime, please encourage your child to drop by the B-Day and E-Day 8th grade lunch hangouts. We do also hope to plan some sort of in-person event for our graduating class in the fall, or when we are able to gather.

Q: Will 8th graders still have to pay senior dues?

We are not collecting senior dues, since most of the paid the activities have been canceled, but students may purchase yearbooks and Class of 2020 t-shirts.

EVERYTHING ELSE

Q: I need technical support with my computer, tablet, software, etc. Can someone help me?

The DOE has launched a family-facing Remote Learning Technical Support ticket system. Families (or someone at school on your behalf) can submit requests for technical support for a broad range of issues, including application support, lost, stolen, or broken devices, and delivery status, through the [Technical Support for Families page](#). For issues specific to MS 447, such as help with your ms447.org or PupilPath logins, contacts Kim Landman (klandman@ms447.org). For questions or assistance with your NYC Schools Account (NYCSA), contact Amy Sirot (asirot@ms447.org).

Q: Will free Wi-Fi be available for the remainder of the school year?

I have requested that the DOE work with the local internet companies to extend free Wi-Fi through June, but do not have a clear answer. If you do not have internet access, you can also

request a DOE iPad, which comes with a hotspot, using this survey. Amy Sirot (asirot@ms447.org) can assist you with this survey.

Q: What opportunities are available for the summer months? Where can I find information regarding summer activities for middle schoolers?

Because we are not sure what restrictions will be in place for our city when summer arrives, we unfortunately don't have a clear sense of what resources/activities will be available for children. While some summer programs have canceled programming, others are still hoping to run, and some are planning virtual camp options. NYC Department of education summer programs can be found [here](#).

Q: What will school look like this fall? When will the 2020-21 school year begin? Will it be safe for students to return to school by then? Or will we still have remote learning?

We wish we had answers to these questions. We are imagining all different scenarios, but we will follow health guidance and requirements set forth by the City, State, and Department of Education.

Q: How will the state budget cuts affect our school? How can we help support the most vulnerable members of our local community?

We don't yet know what our budget for next school year looks like, or how the state and city budget cuts will play out in our school. Our priority will be to make budget decisions that protect our students and staff to the extent we can and maintain the programs that are so important to our school. For those who are able to contribute, MS 447 and its PTA welcome any support that families provide, both for our most vulnerable community members through the [PTA GoFundMe](#) campaign, and through other [PTA fundraising](#) to support MS 447 programs.

Q: Am I all alone in this?

No way! We are all right here with you, muddling through, and we miss you! 