

March 31, 2020

Good morning, good people—

We hope you are well and finding ways to connect with the important people in your life right now. Compared to other parts of the country, we in Grant County have not been hit hard by the coronavirus. Nonetheless, life is complicated right now; many of us in the county are worried about our families, our friends, our jobs, and our futures. At the same time, we've seen an unprecedented level of cooperation and general "looking out for one another" that is inspiring.

Speaking of *connecting with important people in our lives*, your teachers are missing you and want to check in with you. We're at least as disappointed as you students are by the way our last quarter is shaping up—with no chance to meet in our classrooms but only online or on the phone. Nonetheless, an e-connection is better than no connection, so we are seeking out ways to make our time together as students and teachers worthwhile.

So, here's a question we've always wanted to answer—*what if we conducted a nearly unprecedented experiment during the last quarter of the 2019-20 school year: **What if we ran a school entirely online, gave no grades, and relied solely on our native curiosity and need for connections—and called that "going to school"?*** It's not ideal—especially for a school dedicated to experiential education. But there's certainly something to be learned: about what we are missing right now from good old-fashioned face-to-face human contact, what's still possible without it, and what can be improvised on the fly.

Some of you are likely pumping your fist in the air right now—*"Awesome! We have a four-month summer break!"* And who could blame you? At the same time, others among you are "missing the old days"—when you used to come to school 5 days a week, visit with your friends, and learn a little something about your world along the way.

As many of you know by now, the New Mexico Public Education Department announced late last week that, in an effort to curb the Covid-19 pandemic, students throughout the state would not be returning to their classrooms this academic year. As you might guess, the Aldo staff were very disappointed at the news, but at the same time, we support serious, thoughtful efforts to protect New Mexicans—especially the most vulnerable among us—from contracting the coronavirus.

On Friday and Tuesday, Aldo staff met on Zoom (for the uninitiated, an online "conference call") to discuss how to proceed for the next two months. As a state public school, we have to follow the directives of the state Department of Education, of course; so within those restrictions, we put together a plan for the rest of the school year. While not everyone loves our solution, everyone has agreed to support it, keeping the best interests of all 99 Aldo High School students at heart.

Here are the key ideas:

- **Your 3rd quarter grades will become your semester grades.** This is good news for those of you who went into Spring Break with high marks. For those of you who didn't, your teachers are committed to offering you opportunities to bring your grade up to at least passing level, and in some cases, beyond that. Students can make up or redo assignments from 3rd Quarter during the next three weeks, with **April 24** serving as the deadline for closing third-quarter grades.

Although we intend to conduct classes and even make assignments during the remainder of the school year, **teachers will not assign grades to any student work for the rest of the term** (that is, except for 3<sup>rd</sup>-Quarter makeup work). Teachers may choose, however, to *comment* on submitted assignments, offering helpful suggestions and affirmation for especially strong or ambitious work.

Note well that **your Aldo grades for the Spring Semester will be listed as Pass/Fail on your transcripts.** For those of you who pay close attention to your Grade Point Average, note that the state will tabulate your GPA by averaging 7 rather than all 8 semesters of high school. For those Seniors who rely upon a semester grade to corroborate college admissions or a scholarship award, the school will make every effort to convey your 3<sup>rd</sup>-Quarter/2<sup>nd</sup> Semester letter grade to the requesting institution.

- **Online classes will be held Monday through Thursday.** Of course, your teachers have different strategies and instructional styles; some enjoy electronic instruction and communication, others are more tentative about using the screen at a school where hands-on learning is the order of the day. But we have all committed to the following schedule, making ourselves available via Zoom, Google Classroom, and e-mail (and in a few cases phone) during these scheduled times.

<b>Monday</b>	A Block—9-9:55 AM	C Block—10-10:55	E Block—11:00-11:55
<b>Tuesday</b>	B Block—9-9:55 AM	D Block—10-10:55	F Block—11:00-11:55
<b>Wednesday</b>	A Block—9-9:55 AM	C Block—10-10:55	E Block—11:00-11:55
<b>Thursday</b>	B Block—9-9:55 AM	D Block—10-10:55	F Block—11:00-11:55
	Community Orientation - 1:00 - 2:00 PM		

*(By the way, a Grab-&-Go lunch is available Monday through Thursday at Guadalupe Montessori School from 11:30-12:30; the lunches are nutritious, tasty, and free-of-charge. We pack a special “double-lunch” on Thursday, so be sure to stop by on that day in particular!)*

Our hope is that all students will be able to follow this schedule, but we know that there will be challenges. We know that some students have to share computers at home (maybe with a sib in Middle School); we know that parents have work schedules—many of which have been adjusted during the pandemic—that will interfere with our tidy little school schedule; and we know that some older students may have to pick up extra work hours of their own to help support their families during unprecedented challenges to their household economy.

A special note to AP (Advanced Placement) students: On April 6, the College Board will announce two test dates; check this space and check with your Aldo teachers for the official announcement about spring AP testing.

- **We want to make sure that *all* students who want to participate in classes are able to do so.** If you lack a laptop, the school will make sure that you are assigned a Chromebook. If you do not have a Wi-Fi connection in your home, we will assist you with accessing the internet. And if you don't want to participate in "electronic classes," teachers will make accommodations for providing you materials via mail.

To help students out with computer access, the school will loan Chromebooks to those who lack a computer at home. Check this space in the next couple days, where we will announce Chromebook distribution times; for now, we're planning to hand them out during lunchtime at Guadalupe Montessori School.

With all this in mind, please contact Jim McIntosh immediately at 575.574.2902 if you do not have the ability to participate in classes at present. He will be the contact point for making sure that you receive course materials somehow—even if it means delivery from a staff member via school Suburban.

- **We will continue with our annual projects.** Too many of your projects are too good to be abandoned. Many staff are enthusiastic about the work that you have already undertaken and know that many of you would like to see them through to completion.

We also know that a few of you will have to rethink your projects in light of social distancing. For instance, the team who planned to make a feature film now face an exceptional challenge; they may have to submit a screenplay instead or may have to splice together a film shot at multiple locations and artfully edited into a seamless masterpiece. **Be sure to communicate with your mentors each week** (at times that you mutually arrange) for guidance as you move toward completion. Any documents that can be sent electronically—scripts, films, Powerpoints, photos of artwork, musical scores—will allow better feedback from your mentors.

- **We have set May 4<sup>th</sup>** (as in *May the Fourth Be With You*) as the not-to-be-forgotten **project due date**. Your mentors, with your help, will scheme with you ways that you can present your projects to classmates **the following week**, either through Zoom sessions, filmed performances, or galleries of photographed artwork.

All right. The clever among you have already figured this out: *“No grades can be given for 4<sup>th</sup> Quarter work—and projects are due during 4<sup>th</sup> Quarter—I won’t get a grade for my project! Which means, if I do nothing, I will get a Zero, but that doesn’t matter, because it won’t count against me!”*

Alas, this would be an accurate conclusion. But so too would it be a *lame* one. Unless you’re a Senior, there’s really not much we staff can do, “legally,” to make you complete your project by May 4. But if you don’t, underclassmen, look for a small red L in the lower right corner of your diploma the year you graduate. It will stand for *Lame*.

**Seniors, you will all present your projects during the week of May 11-15.** Before you groan about this unfair extra expectation, listen to the good news: **The annual project will be your only academic requirement for 4<sup>th</sup> quarter** and will serve as your “proof of competency,” indicating that you are ready to be turned loose on the wide world. You will be meeting state graduation requirements in the most Aldesque way possible.

Here’s the bottom line: We believe that education is important and that it shouldn’t cease, even during a difficult time. People set up schools in Syrian refugee camps, for goodness’ sake. We know that the pandemic has brought up a mess of confusion, disappointment, insecurity, and even fear for many of us. Indeed, some of your online assignments will address those emotions and concerns. But some of your assignments will be a lot like “regular school” and will ask you to think, to tackle new ideas, and to *know* a little something. There won’t be a high-pressure test at the end of it all, but along the way there will be an exciting exchange of ideas, the challenge of new perspectives, and dare we say it, the pursuit of wisdom. We’ll do the best we can under the circumstances, and in the end, we may surprise ourselves.

With kind regards,  
Your Aldo Teachers