



West Seneca Central School District

Allendale Elementary School • 1399 Orchard Park Road • West Seneca, New York 14224

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Matthew Bystrak
Superintendent of Schools

Dr. Holly Quinn
Principal

Dear Allendale Families,

I want to say that we miss you and hope that everyone is well! Also, thank you so much for your patience and understanding as we have continued to adjust to the drastic changes in life during the last several weeks. As both a parent and an educator, I understand just how much is being asked of you right now. Each family is experiencing this time differently, juggling their own unique needs. Please remember, that although we continue to send curricular activities home weekly, we understand that your focus may need to be on your family's safety, health, and well-being. If you have chosen to engage in family activities rather than schoolwork or you are experiencing difficulty in home situation, **please reach out to your child's teacher and check in with them once a week and let them know how your family is doing and if you need the school to assist you in any way.** We get worried about you and your family when we don't hear from you.

I encourage you to make building strong family relationships a priority and to **focus on playtime, downtime, and family time**. Think about how to help your kids continue to develop *skills* rather than trying to re-create school *content* by assigning extra worksheets and flashcards. Critical skills for kids of all grade levels include reading, problem solving, and communication, as well as social-emotional skills like resilience, collaboration, flexibility, and positive coping. Use this time at home to support these skills along with prioritizing students' well-being and engagement with learning. As a family, discuss and agree to a routine that might include the following:

- **Reading for Pleasure** – Time spent reading is strongly linked to academic achievement. For kids of all ages, this is one of the best “academic” areas for you to encourage. Re-reading childhood favorites, reading aloud, reading interactively with a family member, and listening to audiobooks are all excellent ways to support literacy skills.
- **Personal Interest Projects** – Find time for students to dive more deeply into their own interest areas. Give them voice and choice to explore something they are curious about or have always wanted to learn. Whether it's researching sea otters, understanding the stock market, or analyzing the lyrics to songs from *Hamilton*, let your student explore online resources or call a friend or family member to share their expertise.
- **Social Time** – Kids will likely be missing their friends as well as the social aspects of school more than the academics. Encourage them to connect to friends through Facetime, social media, phone calls, and even handwritten letters. Leave chalk messages on driveways or ask kids to brainstorm other creative ways to interact with neighbors and friends.
- **Family Time** – While you might feel like you have nothing but family time right now, make sure you actually spend time together as a family unit. Prepare and eat meals together, play games, take walks, talk to each other. Use this time to check in on how your family is coping and let your children know that you are there to keep them safe.

- **Chores** – We often believe that our children are too young or too busy to help with household chores, but contributing to the family in this way can foster responsibility and independence. Use the time now to practice important skills like cooking, doing laundry, mowing the lawn, or cleaning the bathroom.
- **Service** – Find big or small ways to be of service to somebody else. Pose this as a problem that your family might solve together: How might we help others? You may want to organize a food drive where neighbors leave canned goods on their porches and one healthy adult delivers them to a food bank, have older kids virtually babysit for a co-worker’s younger kids, or reach out to seniors to see what they might need.
- **Exercise and Meditation/Deep Breathing** – This is important for kids and adults alike. Go for a run, do family yoga, coordinate with friends to do virtual workouts together, or put on some music and dance. This is a great way to build in family time while also developing positive coping skills.
- **Good Sleep** – Most kids do not get the 9-11 hours they actually need each night. Use this time to develop good sleep hygiene by keeping devices out of bedrooms, turning off screens at least an hour before bedtime, and getting to bed at an appropriate hour. You can also let your teen wake up later than usual now that they do not have to commute to school.
- **Sensible Screen Time** – Try to balance work time (yours and your child’s) with ample breaks and time to connect. It might feel like everyone is spending too much time on screens right now, especially if you need to use the television or the computer to keep kids occupied while you get some work done, but it’s ok. Try to strike a balance with non-screen activities as much as possible, especially during evenings and weekends.

If you set up a routine that includes the suggestions above, your child will be learning important academic, social, and emotional skills that will prepare them for returning to the classroom and help them thrive in school and out. So be gentle on yourself. Be patient with your kids and your partner. Have empathy for teachers and express your gratitude for them and others. Try to embrace and enjoy this family time and stay healthy.

Remember, at the end of all of this, your child’s mental health will be more important than their academic skills. Moreover, how they felt during this time will stay with them long after the memory of what they did during those weeks is long gone. So keep that in mind, every single day.

We will get through this together,
Dr. Holly Quinn

(Challenge Success, Stanford University)